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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 238 WASHINGTON, JUNE 11, 2008 NUMBER 4,837

Recount II: Return to the Swamp

IT IS USUALLY A MISTAKE to read too deeply into the character of a presidential candidate on the basis of some tactical maneuver or grubby compromise. Anybody who was a saint wouldn't be in the position of running for the White House. And yet, Hillary Clinton's speech last week in Florida was so audacious, so divorced from reality, that it begs characterological questions.

In the speech, Clinton—summoning as much passion and moral fervor as she has mustered at any point in the campaign—demanded that the Florida and Michigan delegations be seated at the Democratic National Convention. She compared her cause to abolition and women's suffrage. And—perhaps even more outrageous to those of us who have lived through the last eight years but weren't around for Seneca Falls—she said the Democratic Party and Barack Obama were reenacting the Republican effort to prevent the Florida recount in 2000.

BARACK OBAMA: JASON MOORE/ZUMA PRESS; HILLARY CLINTON: RAY CHAVEZ/OAKLAND TRIBUNE/ZUMA PRESS

It is a repellent comparison. "I remember very well back in 2000," she said. "There were those who argued that people's votes should be discounted over technicalities." We remember back in 2007, when Hillary Clinton was one of the people arguing that Florida's and Michigan's votes should be discounted. Her ostensible discovery of the absolute moral principle that every state delegation must be seated in full, whether or not its primary was contested, is purely instrumental and highly dubious.

The fight over the scheduling of the primaries is not one that ought to seize anybody's moral imagination. The current primary system is fairly silly, with Iowa and New Hampshire clinging to outsized roles without any particular justification save precedent. Florida and Michigan, however, did not move their primaries forward in the calendar to advance a principle or improve a flawed system. They did so to increase their own political leverage. They were willing to risk losing some or even all of their seated delegates because they craved the p.r. value that accompanies the earliest primary contests—and they pursued this attention with the full knowledge that it might ultimately cost them.

But, if this whole contretemps can be traced back to an irrational system for nominating candidates and the recklessness of two states, Clinton won't acknowledge it. Last week, she declared that "not counting Florida and Michigan is changing a central governing rule of this country—that whenever we can understand the clear intent of the voters, their votes should be counted." This is a deliberately misleading conflation of the two meanings of the word "count." The ballots of the Florida primary were, in fact, counted. The prize that both sides understood to be at stake—bragging rights about a big-state victory—was awarded to the winner, Hillary Clinton. That the votes would not produce delegates was something she and her supporters understood well in advance.

Nevertheless, her comparison to the 2000 election does resonate in one crucial respect. In 2000, George W. Bush's campaign and its allies invented and discarded principles whenever it suited them. They called hand counts of ballots inherently unreliable. They insisted on following the letter of the law except in cases, like military ballots, where it benefited them. This proved to be a foreboding premonition of how Bush would use power as president.

Likewise, Clinton's behavior in this case offers a window into her temperament. She appears to have retreated into a cocoon of self-righteousness and unreality. Her management of this issue—and, in some ways, the whole campaign—echoes her management of health care reform back in her husband's first term.

In that debacle, Hillary Clinton's efforts foundered thanks to a host of now-familiar factors. There was her reliance on incompetent advisers. In 1993, her chief guide was Ira Magaziner, who managed to alienate all those around him. As Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala later told author Sally Bedell Smith, "[Magaziner] assumed you were a fool if you asked a question. Bill and Hillary were fascinated by him. They thought he was a genius." In today's

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Hillaryland, Magaziner has, of course, been superseded by Mark Penn.

Above all, Clinton displayed an inability to grasp the process, confusing dissent with disloyalty, a mindset that ultimately put her out of touch with political reality. J. Bradford DeLong, then a Treasury Department economist, later recalled:

> So when senior members of the economic team said that key senators like Daniel Patrick Moynihan would have this-and-that objection, she told them they were disloyal. When junior members of the economic team told her that the Congressional Budget Office would say such-and-such, she told them (wrongly) that her conversations with CBO head Robert Reischauer had already fixed that. When long-time senior Hill staffers told her that she was making a dreadful mistake by fighting with rather than reaching out to John Breaux and Jim Cooper, she told them that they did not understand the wave of popular political support the bill would generate.

When Clinton came to the Senate, she made every effort to show that she had learned from her mistakes. But, in her capacity as candidate, she is an executive again, and it's clear that little has changed. The one positive quality that even her critics concede she has demonstrated is that she's a "fighter." There was a candidate like that during the 2000 Florida recount, too—a fighter who considered victory his birthright and who, unlike his opponent, would not let ethical reservations hold him back. That was George W. Bush.

Hunger Strike

On May 5, as the winds of Cyclone Nargis were dissipating to the north of Burma, the U.S. government took its best shot at saving the day. A grand total of $250,000—the price of a condo in Dallas, or a lecture from Bill Clinton—would be sent to help the storm's victims. The amount of aid offered by the United States would grow in the days to come, but the pattern was set: America was not going to do nearly enough to help the Burmese people.

Actually, our most atrocious failure in Burma has nothing to do with money. It has to do with politics. In the three weeks since the disaster, the country's brutal junta has seized shipments of food and medical assistance, blocked vessels with aid cargo—including three U.S. Navy ships—and kept out many foreign relief workers. At the height of the chaos, Burma's military leaders even forged ahead with a constitutional referendum, passed with suspiciously broad support, that consolidates and continues the regime's pillage of national resources.

If this disaster had happened ten years ago—that is, before Iraq—plans would almost certainly be on the table for some form of humanitarian intervention designed to resolve the situation. Maybe we would be talking about deposing the Burmese regime outright; maybe we would be discussing—as Robert Kaplan did in a recent *New York Times* op-ed—more modest steps, such as sending U.S. Marines on boats to deliver supplies to the hardest-hit areas. But, either way, realistic options would be considered for saving Burmese lives, even if those options involved violating Burmese sovereignty.

Instead, American diplomats in Asia have explicitly avoided direct criticism of the regime. And, even as the USAID brigade waits for visas in Bangkok so that it can enter Burma, the White House has made sure to clarify that no threat of force is on the horizon.

This is, put simply, an unacceptable abdication of our moral responsibilities. Even though our standing in the world has been severely diminished by Iraq, we should at least be debating intervention in Burma. There are, no doubt, many logistical complications and unintended consequences that would follow from such a policy. But there are also reasons why it should be a live option. The goal of such an intervention need not be regime change; it should simply be to make sure that a vulnerable population receives the supplies it desperately needs. Of course, if violating the sovereignty of a murderous regime happens to undermine that regime's legitimacy, then that would not be such a terrible result. But this does not necessarily have to be our goal.

For now, unfortunately, the junta's leaders can rest assured that no one is going to threaten their sovereignty. Instead, we will send money and food—much of which will undoubtedly be hoarded by the junta—and comfort ourselves with the lie that our charity, and our charity alone, will be enough. ◆

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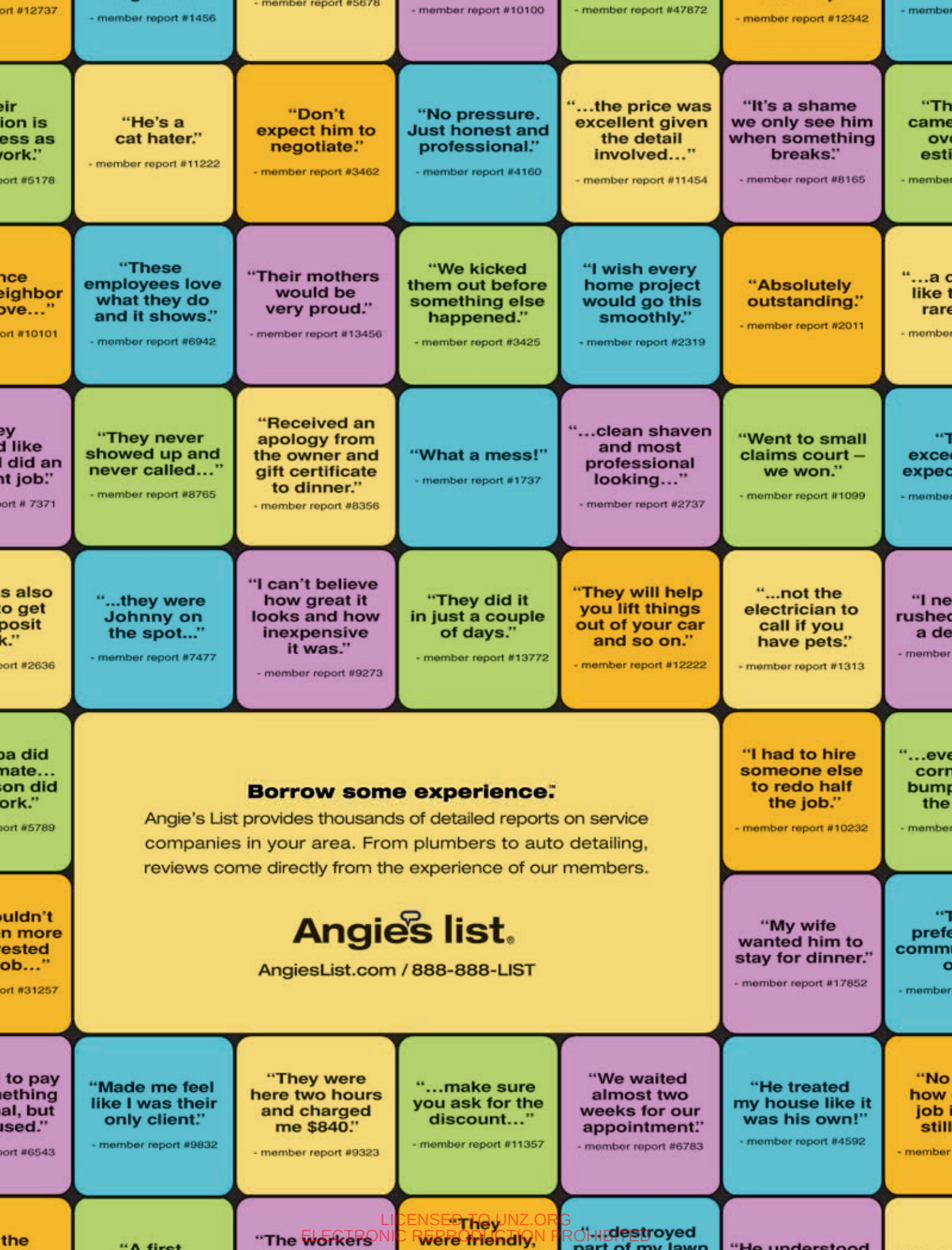
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- member report #5678
- member report #10100
- member report #47872
- member report #12342
"He's a cat hater."
- member report #11222
"Don't expect him to negotiate."
- member report #3462
"No pressure. Just honest and professional."
- member report #4160
"...the price was excellent given the detail involved..."
- member report #11454
"It's a shame we only see him when something breaks."
- member report #8165
"These employees love what they do and it shows."
- member report #6942
"Their mothers would be very proud."
- member report #13456
"We kicked them out before something else happened."
- member report #3425
"I wish every home project would go this smoothly."
- member report #2319
"Absolutely outstanding."
- member report #2011
"They never showed up and never called..."
- member report #8765
"Received an apology from the owner and gift certificate to dinner."
- member report #8356
"What a mess!"
- member report #1737
"...clean shaven and most professional looking..."
- member report #2737
"Went to small claims court – we won."
- member report #1099
"...they were Johnny on the spot..."
- member report #7477
"I can't believe how great it looks and how inexpensive it was."
- member report #9273
"They did it in just a couple of days."
- member report #13772
"They will help you lift things out of your car and so on."
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"Made me feel like I was their only client."
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"They were here two hours and charged me $840."
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"...make sure you ask for the discount..."
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"He treated my house like it was his own!"
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The Illusionist

Watch John McCain saw the budget in half!

JONATHAN CHAIT

If you accuse John McCain of agreeing with George W. Bush on economics, he'll come back at you with the one big issue where he and Bush disagree: spending. McCain may (now) approve of the Bush tax cuts, but he lacerates the president for his spendthrift ways. This, McCain says, is a "fundamental" difference between him and Bush.

But you know who *else* disagrees with George W. Bush on spending? George W. Bush. The president has been lamenting excessive spending for years now. Bush's line is the same as McCain's: The tax cuts are swell, but "[t]hat's just one part of the equation. We've got to cut out wasteful spending."

Actually, McCain is following the pattern of not just Bush but every Republican president since Ronald Reagan. Phase One is to enact tax cuts and promise that they'll cause revenues to rise, or will cause revenues to fall (leading to spending cuts), or somehow both at once, so, either way, there's no possibility that it will lead to deficits. Phase Two is deficits. Phase Three is to blame the deficits on big-spending congressional fat cats and to issue increasingly strident threats to cut expenditures, without going so far as to identify actual programs to cut.

One of the tropes of this phase is railing against the evils of pork-barrel spending. President Bush's position is that earmarks are really bad. ("The time has come to end this practice [of congressional earmarking]," he urges. "So let us work together to reform the budget process, expose every earmark to the light of day and to a vote in Congress.") McCain's position is that earmarks are really, *really* bad. He likes to hold up for ridicule a federal program to study bear DNA, and he has taken to using the same language to taunt congressional appropriators ("I'm their worst nightmare") that he otherwise reserves for Hamas.

Another trope is the embrace of the line-item veto as panacea. Reagan crusaded for the line-item veto, as did George H.W. Bush. Today McCain vows, "I will seek a constitutionally valid line-item veto to end the practice [of earmarking] once and for all." When then–Vice President Bush was making the line-item veto a big issue in the 1988 campaign, economist Doug Holtz-Eakin studied state budgets over the previous 28 years. He concluded that "over time, in the hands of Republicans and Democrats alike, the line-item veto fails to cut spending." Apparently Holtz-Eakin has failed to share these findings with McCain, whom he serves as chief economics adviser.

McCain's crusade against domestic spending is a wild misdiagnosis of the problem. Most conservatives believe their main error has been to deviate from the true small-government faith, and McCain has embraced the narrative. "We were elected to reduce the size of government and enlarge the sphere of free and private initiative," he told the Republican group GOPAC. "Then we lavished money, in a time of war, on thousands of projects of dubious, if any, public value."

The audience is meant to take this to mean that the size of government has expanded under Bush largely because of pork-barrel spending or other domestic outlays. In fact, the growth of government under Bush is mostly due to higher spending on defense and homeland security, which have grown from 3.6 percent of the economy to 5.6 percent. Domestic discretionary spending (that is, programs other than entitlements) has *fallen* as a share of GDP, from 3.1 percent to 2.8 percent. (These numbers come from Richard Kogan of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.)

McCain is promising to cut taxes by $300 billion per year *on top of* the Bush tax cuts, which he would make permanent. In addition to this, he promises to balance the budget in his first term. When asked how he could possibly pull this off, McCain has asserted that he could eliminate all earmark spending, saving $100 billion per year.

I don't find this explanation persuasive. The first point I'd make is that $100 billion is, in fact, less than $300 billion. The second point I'd make is that McCain won't even cut $100 billion, or anywhere close. By conventional measures, earmarks only account for $18 billion per year. McCain gets his number by employing an unusually broad definition of what constitutes an earmark. McCain's definition includes things like aid to Israel and housing for members of the military that are not "pork" as the term is understood. When asked if he would eliminate those programs, he replied, "Of course not."

So we're left with a pot of money closer to $18 billion. And McCain surely won't eliminate even that. He has frequently found himself campaigning at places funded by federal earmarks and beloved by the local citizenry, and he keeps inadvertently showing how impossible it is to fulfill his promises. Last month, McCain visited a hospital in Pennsylvania and met an ovarian cancer patient who's being treated with a clinical trial program funded by an earmark. Asked if he would eliminate that program, he replied, "It's the process I object to. … When you earmark in the middle of the night, you have no budgetary constraints."

Likewise, when pressed by NPR's Robert Siegel, McCain insisted he supports programs so long as "there's a need" and only wants "to do it through an open, honest, transparent process that is proceeded by hearings and authorization." A perfectly sound position. But, if you're merely shifting spending from earmarks to the regular budget process, then you're not saving any money.

Indeed, *The Washington Post* recently did a long reported story on the bear DNA project that McCain has made the butt of so many jokes. ("Three million to study the DNA of bears in Montana. Unbelievable," scoffs one McCain ad.) The *Post* found that the project is a tool for measuring the bear population in Glacier National Park and has a sound scientific basis. When contacted by the story's author, McCain's campaign gave a familiar reply: "Senator McCain does not question the merits of these projects; it's the process that he has a problem with." If McCain won't even commit to zeroing out his single favorite example of government waste, it's not clear that he'll save any money at all.

During the GOP primary, McCain presented his economic program as a more ideologically pure version of Bushism. Now he puts the same thing forward as a new synthesis. "It will not be enough," he says, "to simply dust off the economic policies of four, eight or twenty-eight years ago." Right; those other presidents had huge tax cuts for the rich combined with unspecified spending cuts. McCain's plan has those things *and* a joke about bear DNA. How heterodox! ◆

TRB
From Washington

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The Survivalists

How Burma's junta hangs on.

As the death toll from the cyclone that hit Burma earlier this month spirals past 100,000, the country's ruling junta continues its intransigence. Holed up in its new bunker capital in the middle of the country, the regime has gone from initially welcoming aid, to blocking U.S. and French assistance, to simply seizing relief supplies—before, finally, relenting and allowing some aid in. All the while, the chance for effective relief has grown slimmer.

Burma defies political understanding in many ways. In the twenty-first century, when military juntas are all but dead, how has a regime run by an uneducated general managed to survive for over four decades, while providing little economic growth? The junta's reaction to the cyclone—blocking aid and then relenting just a bit to keep the world off its back—provides a glimpse of an answer. While successful at little else, the Burmese regime is extraordinarily adept at one thing: doing the bare minimum to continue business as usual, both abroad and at home.

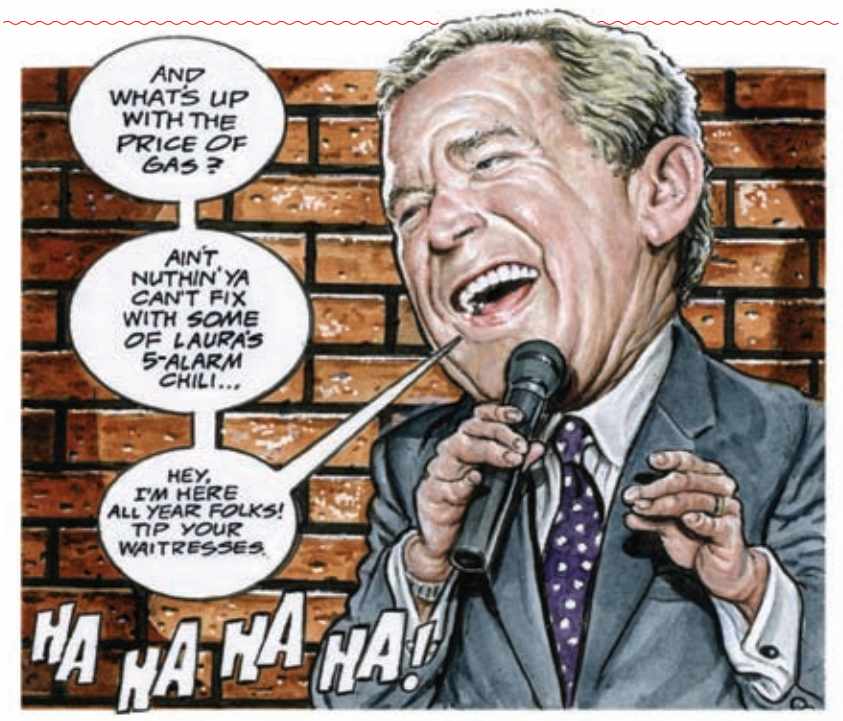
It may be a military junta, but brute force cannot explain the survival of the Burmese dictatorship. True, when major protests have erupted—as they did last year—the military has crushed them, killing hundreds and, in 1988, probably thousands. But the generals are savvy enough to understand that, in a nation as small as Burma, co-option is a more effective strategy. They've focused their palliative efforts on the army, creating a parallel social welfare system for soldiers while steadily expanding the size of the military. (Today, it is the second-largest force in Southeast Asia.) The relatively modern military hospitals in Rangoon contrast sharply with the dilapidated public health system. The average Burmese knows that, if you want decent health care or a good education, you have to have a relative in the military. So, although they hate the junta, people often try to get their sons into military positions; this, in turn, links them to the junta and undermines potential opposition to the government.

The junta has also created a mass youth organization, called the USDA. Though many join the USDA simply to avoid harassment by the regime, there is a dedicated core of USDA members drawn from the families of businesspeople close to the government and other regime cronies. USDA acolytes serve as a counterweight to the student leaders at the fore of pro-democracy protests and have even harassed and beaten them. According to one human rights group, USDA members also infiltrate and try to intimidate civil organizations.

The generals blend co-option with isolation, divorcing their soldiers from average citizens. As the army and other regime allies lose touch with their countrymen, it becomes easier for soldiers to gun down their fellow Burmese. During last year's Saffron Revolution, for example, soldiers even proved willing to attack monks, the most venerated segment of Burmese society. Such separation also makes it less likely that a top military leader will break from the junta. Moving the capital from cosmopolitan Rangoon to a jungle redoubt—a decision portrayed as loony by the foreign press—cemented the army's alienation from society.

Essentially, the government was providing just enough comfort to just enough people to stay in power—and it was doing the same thing abroad long be-

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**


AND WHAT'S UP WITH THE PRICE OF GAS?
AIN'T NUTHIN' YA CAN'T FIX WITH SOME OF LAURA'S 5-ALARM CHILI...
HEY, I'M HERE ALL YEAR FOLKS! TIP YOUR WAITRESSES.
HA HA HA HA!

"Take My Job, Please," George W. Bush's farewell comedy tour.

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fore the cyclone struck. For example, the regime promised slightly greater political openness in order to secure enough outside investment to fuel limited economic growth. The junta promoted détente with pro-democracy opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, briefly releasing her from house arrest on several occasions. It also launched tourism campaigns, allowing multinationals like Shangri-La Hotels to put up new buildings like the Traders Hotel in downtown Rangoon, where tourists could buy day-old copies of the *International Herald Tribune*, sip cappuccinos, and think they were in Singapore or Bangkok. After the investment flowed in, though, the junta abandoned détente. In 2003, USDA-affiliated thugs attacked Suu Kyi on a rural road, killing members of her entourage, and the regime re-arrested her. And, today, the Traders seems ghostly empty.

The other key to the regime's survival lies in Burma's second city, Mandalay. Spread across hot, dusty plains, the city immortalized by Kipling would resemble any squalid developing world city were it not for the crumbling Buddhist monasteries on the outskirts of town and the colonial-era fort in the center. But, in recent years, Mandalay's business district has become a bustling commercial area, full of trucks unloading cheap radios and other consumer goods, new apartment blocks, and small shopping malls. Nearly all the goods—and most of the shopkeepers—come from neighboring China. At one brand new shop selling cheap jewelry, a woman from neighboring Yunnan province exulted in her good fortune. "We can bring in anything," she said.

Once only a bit player in Burma, China has become a dominant presence over the past decade. In recent years, it has helped finance a massive new petroleum pipeline into Burma and become the regime's major source of aid. As the relationship warms, thousands—if not tens of thousands—of Chinese traders and businesspeople have flowed into northern and central Burma to sell everything from apples to air conditioners. At international bodies like the United Nations, where Burma faced a Security Council investigation into its human rights abuses and humanitarian crisis, Beijing has repeatedly protected the junta.

China's support has emasculated human rights campaigners, who had successfully pressured many Western companies to leave Burma, but who have little influence over Chinese firms. Moreover, China allows the junta to thumb its nose at the United States, which has maintained sanctions against Burma for more than a decade. By courting the generals, China has forced regional powers like India to drop their own past efforts to push political reform in Burma in order to compete with Beijing for oil and gas. As the regime was brutalizing monks and other demonstrators last year, India's petroleum minister actually visited Burma to sign new deals.

Fortunately, while the junta may see little reason to change its m.o., Beijing may be having second thoughts about backing Burma's dictatorship. As was the case in Darfur—where they went from doing nothing to supporting a peace-keeping force—Chinese leaders are recognizing that resisting the will of the entire international community can gravely damage their image. Even more important, Burma's problems, such as HIV and heroin, have been seeping across the border into southwestern China. Privately, Chinese diplomats fear that the regime's policies could eventually result in massive unrest in Burma, sparking a refugee crisis and damaging China's interests. Already, during last year's protests, someone fired gunshots on the Chinese consulate in Mandalay.

So Beijing has begun to budge. In a 2006 meeting with Burmese leaders, Chinese premier Wen Jiabao tacitly criticized the generals' failure to address social problems. According to the International Crisis Group, Beijing has recently backed attempts by the U.N.'s special Burma envoy to reconcile the junta with the opposition. Chinese officials have even met with exiled Burmese pro-democracy groups based in Thailand. With its investment, aid, and close relations, Beijing could make a substantial impact in Burma. It could push the generals to accept far more international relief, to at least begin a substantive dialogue with Suu Kyi, and even to embrace real economic reforms. If it did, at least some good might come of this tragedy.

Joshua Kurlantzick

Edel Rodriguez

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Justice Delayed

The case against California's gay marriage decision.

The California Supreme Court's expansive decision last week to legalize gay marriage has presented its opponents with an unfortunate opportunity. If the legal merits of the decision had been clear, the court's boldness could have been justified as a triumph of shining principle over pragmatic politics. Unfortunately, the legal merits are extremely murky, giving ammunition to those who are mobilizing to overturn the decision by initiative this fall. In addition, the California decision may trigger a backlash that hurts Democratic chances in November and guarantees a conservative U.S. Supreme Court for decades to come. For all of their noble intentions, therefore, the California justices may have handed supporters of gay marriage a Pyrrhic victory.

It's easy to celebrate the majority opinion by Chief Justice Ronald M. George, a Republican appointee, for standing up for simple fairness and for anticipating the future. Given that young people support gay marriage just as strongly as older ones oppose it, there's little doubt that, in a few decades, gay marriage will be legal throughout the United States—as well it should be. And it's obvious that George and his colleagues saw themselves as brave pioneers whose judgment would ultimately be vindicated by history: The California justices repeatedly compared bans on gay marriage to bans on interracial marriage and suggested that their decision, in time, would be as celebrated as the California Supreme Court's decision striking down anti-miscegenation laws in 1948.

But the analogy to interracial marriage bans is less than perfect. The central question in the California case is whether it's possible to create a separate-but-equal category of civil unions for gays and lesbians without demeaning them. Some commentators, such as Andrew Sullivan, have powerfully argued that, in the case of marriage, separate is inherently unequal and demeaning. That's a plausible argument, but not everyone agrees. Of the courts that have considered this question, two (Vermont and New Jersey) have held that civil unions can, in fact, be a separate but equal alternative to marriage; only one (Massachusetts) has disagreed. Moreover, Democratic presidential candidates from John Kerry to Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama support civil unions but oppose gay marriage. Judicial decisions that blithely pronounce the basic positions of major political parties to be unconstitutional haven't fared well in American history—as reaction to the Dred Scott and *Roe* v. *Wade* decisions shows. (By contrast, when *Brown* came down in 1954, it was supported by more than half of the country and not officially opposed by the Democratic Party or the GOP.)

ANTHONY RUSSO

Although you can argue the question either way, Chief Justice George inadvertently undermined the heart of his own conclusion that civil unions are inherently demeaning. He and his colleagues conceded that California's marriage laws were *not* motivated by prejudice or animus—unlike interracial marriage bans, whose supporters explicitly said in 1948 that they were trying to maintain white supremacy. "We do not suggest that the current marriage provisions were enacted with an invidious intent or purpose," the California justices declared. Indeed, when the California legislature expanded domestic partnerships in 2003 to include all the legal benefits of marriage, it said that its goal was to provide essential rights to "all caring and committed couples, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation" and to "reduce discrimination on the bases of sex and sexual orientation." (The legislature later voted twice to legalize gay marriage in bills vetoed by the governor.) Under most constitutional analysis, the concession that California's decision to create civil unions rather than gay marriage wasn't motivated by prejudice should have ended the matter: Courts generally uphold laws unless they're irrational, and, without evidence of hidden animus, it's hard to conclude that a desire to maintain the traditional definition of marriage is completely irrational.

To get around this analytical roadblock, the California Supreme Court had to hold that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation should be treated as skeptically as racial discrimination—an argument that the U.S. Supreme Court and other state supreme courts have so far refused to accept. Social conservatives are already questioning one of the premises of this conclusion: that sexual orientation, like race, is immutable. "There is no evidence to establish that a homosexual lifestyle is an immutable characteristic such as race," a lawyer with the socially conservative Advocates for Faith and Freedom told *The New York Times*. The other tests for identifying constitutionally "suspect classes"—that is, groups, such as racial minorities, entitled to the highest level of constitutional protection—are even more malleable. For example, how do you decide whether gays and lesbians have adequate political influence without having some idea of how much influence they're entitled to expect? Wasn't the fact that the domestic partnership bill passed in California evidence that gays and lesbians do have political power? For these reasons, other courts have refrained from calling gays and lesbians a suspect class, and, by opening this Pandora's box, the California justices increased the possibility that their decision will be overturned.

The California justices combatively declared that they didn't care if their decision was unpopular or even repudiated: "The Court should review individual rights questions, unabated by its judgment about whether a particular result will be subject to criticism, hostility, or disobedience." But Michael Klarman of Harvard Law School, who is writing a book on constitutional backlashes against judicial rulings, argues that the Massachusetts gay marriage decision in 2003 may have cost John Kerry the last presidential election by increasing social conservative turnout in swing states, like Ohio, whose ballots included initiatives to ban gay marriage. Those initiatives passed by overwhelming margins: Before the Massachusetts decision, only four state constitutions defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman; today, 26 state constitutions have gay marriage bans. During the 2004 election, Klarman concludes, opposition to same-sex marriage also provided the margin of victory for Republicans in closely fought Senate races in states like Kentucky and South Dakota.

The Massachusetts decision wasn't overturned by the voters, largely because of the state's intentionally cumbersome constitutional-amendment process, but California's constitution can be amended by a simple majority of voters. According to a recent Field Poll, 51 percent of Californians oppose extending existing marriage laws to include same-sex couples (although only one-third of Californians oppose equal civil unions as well). It's possible that the anti–gay marriage initiative will fail in November, given the closeness of the polls and the fact that undecided voters may be moved by the

(continued on page 12)

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Does science make belief in God obsolete?

No, and yes.

No, as a matter of reason and truth. The knowledge we have gained through modern science makes belief in an Intelligence behind the cosmos more reasonable than ever.

Yes, as a matter of mood, sensibility, and sentiment. Not science itself but a reductive "scientific mentality" that often accompanies it, along with the power, control, comfort, and convenience provided by modern technology, has helped to push the concept of God into the hazy twilight of agnosticism.

Superficially it may seem that the advances of science have made God obsolete by providing natural explanations for phenomena that were once thought to be the result of direct divine activity—the so-called "God of the gaps." But this advance has been the completion of a program of purification from superstition begun thousands of years

ago by Athens and Jerusalem, by a handful of Greek sages, and by the people of Israel, who "de-divinized" Nature to a degree unparalleled in the ancient world…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, O.P., is a Dominican friar, the Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for Education of the Roman Catholic Church, and was lead editor of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Of course not.

Belief—or disbelief—in God is not a scientific opinion, a judgment about physical facts in the world. It is an element in something larger and more puzzling—our wider world-view, the set of background assumptions by which we make sense of our world as a whole.

We seldom notice these assumptions, but we often use them in resolving our inner conflicts. As life goes on, we shape them gradually into patterns by which to relate the things we find most important. And occasionally, when something goes badly wrong, we realize that we must somehow think differently about our whole lives. Doing this is not an irrational substitute for formal proof. It is the groundwork without which new thought is impossible…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Mary Midgley is a philosopher with a special interest in ethics, human nature, and science, and is the author of Evolution as a Religion *and* Science as Salvation.

It depends.

The answer turns on whether one emphasizes *belief* or *God*. Science does not make belief in God obsolete, but it may

make obsolete the reality of God, depending on how far we are able to push the science.

On the question of belief in God, the answer is clearly *no*. Surveys conducted in 1916 and again in 1997 found that 40 percent of American scientists said they believe in God, so obviously the practice of science does not make belief in God obsolete for this sizable group. Neither does it for the hundreds of millions of practicing Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and members of other faiths who both believe in God and fully embrace science. Even on one of the most contentious issues in all of science—evolution—a 2005 Pew Research Center poll found that 68 percent of Protestants and 69 percent of Catholics accept the theory…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Michael Shermer is the publisher of Skeptic *magazine (www.skeptic.com), a monthly columnist for* Scientific American *(www.michaelshermer.com), a professor at Claremont Graduate University, and the author of* How We Believe, Why Darwin Matters, *and* The Mind of the Market.

Yes.

Once upon a time there were a number of strong scientific arguments for the existence of God. One of the oldest and most prevalent is the argument from design. Most people look at the complexity of the world and cannot conceive of how it could have come about except by the action of a being or force of great power and intelligence.

The design argument received perhaps its most brilliant exposition in the work of the Anglican archdeacon William Paley. In his *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearance of Nature*, first published in 1802, Paley wrote about finding both a stone and a watch while crossing a heath. Though the stone would be regarded as a simple part of nature, no one

would question that the watch is an artifact, designed for the purpose of telling time. Paley then proposed that objects of nature, such as the human eye, give every indication of being similar contrivances…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Victor J. Stenger is emeritus professor of physics and astronomy, University of Hawaii, adjunct professor of philosophy, University of Colorado, and the author of seven books including God: The Failed Hypothesis—How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist.

No.

Far from making belief in God obsolete, some interpretations of modern science provide positive reinforcement for belief in God.

The methodology of the natural sciences requires the formulation of fruitful questions about the nature of the world that can be answered by careful and repeatable observations. The use of controlled experiments aids the construction of illuminating schemes of classification or of causal hypotheses that explain why things are as they are. The development of mathematical techniques for describing and predicting observable regularities is

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usually an important part of a scientific approach to the world.

There are many different sorts of natural science, from the patient observations of botany

and ethology to the more theory-laden hypotheses of quantum cosmology. What is their relation to belief in God? The answer depends on how one defines God…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Keith Ward is a Fellow of the British Academy, an ordained priest in the Church of England, a Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and the author of The Big Questions in Science and Religion, Pascal's Fire: Scientific Faith and Religious Understanding, *and* Is Religion Dangerous?

No, not at all.

As a physician and researcher, I employ science to decipher human biology and treat disease. As a person of faith, I look to my religious tradition for the touchstones of a moral life. Neither science nor faith need contradict the other; in fact, if one appreciates the essence of each, they can enrich each other in a person's life.

So, the question of obsolescence is miscast, because

science and faith should exist in separate realms. Science uses logic and experimental methods to measure and describe the material world. It yields knowledge about the workings of molecules and machines, mitosis and momentum. Science has no moral valence. It is neutral. DNA technology can craft a cure for a cancer or produce a weapon of bioterrorism. It is only a person's application of science that takes on a moral dimension…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Jerome Groopman is the Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard and author of How Doctors Think.

Yes, if by…

"science" we mean the entire enterprise of secular reason and knowledge (including history and philosophy), not just people with test tubes and white lab coats.

Traditionally, a belief in God was attractive because it promised to explain the deepest puzzles about origins. Where did the world come from? What is the basis of life? How can the mind arise from the body? Why should anyone be moral?

Yet over the millennia, there has been an inexorable trend: the deeper we probe these questions, and the more we learn about the world in which we live, the less reason there is to believe in God.

Start with the origin of the world. Today no honest and informed person can maintain that the universe came into being a few thousand years ago and assumed its current form in six days (to say nothing of absurdities like day and night existing before the sun was created)…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Steven Pinker is the Johnstone Family Professor in the department of psychology at Harvard University. He is the author of seven books, including The Language Instinct, How the Mind Works, The Blank Slate, *and most recently,* The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature.

Not necessarily.

But you must find a science-friendly, science-compatible God. First, try the pantheon of available Creators. Inspect thoroughly. If none fits the bill, invent one.

The God of your choice must be a stickler for divine principles.

Science does not take kindly to a deity who, if piqued or euphoric, sets aside seismological or cosmological principles and causes the moon to shiver, the earth to split asunder, or the universe to suddenly reverse its expansion. This God must, among other things, be stoically indifferent to supplications for changing local meteorological conditions, the task having already been assigned to the discipline of fluid dynamics. Therefore, indigenous peoples, even if they dance with great energy around totem poles, shall not cause even a drop of rain to fall on parched soil. Your rule-abiding and science-respecting God equally well dispenses with tearful Christians singing the Book of Job, pious Hindus feverishly reciting the *havan yajna*, or earnest Muslims performing the *salat-i-istisqa* as they face the Holy Ka'aba…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy is chairman of the department of physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan, and is the author of Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality.

No, but it should.

Until about 1832, when it first seems to have become established as a noun and a concept, the term "scientist" had no really independent

meaning. "Science" meant "knowledge" in much the same way as "physic" meant medicine, and those who conducted experiments or organized field expeditions or managed laboratories were known as "natural philosophers." To these gentlemen (for they were mainly gentlemen) the belief in a divine presence or inspiration was often merely assumed to be a part of the natural order, in rather the same way as it was assumed—or actually insisted upon—that a teacher at Cambridge University swear an oath to be an ordained Christian minister…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Christopher Hitchens is the author of God Is Not Great *and the editor of* The Portable Atheist.

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thousands of marriages that will have already been performed by then. But if the initiative passes, as supporters expect, the California court's self-congratulatory rhetoric about the wisdom of imposing gay marriage by judicial fiat will look shortsighted rather than prescient.

Perhaps the California decision will hurt Democrats less than the Massachusetts decision in 2004. Christian evangelicals who would be most motivated to turn out in opposition to gay marriage already mistrust McCain for opposing the federal marriage amendment. (They may be more motivated by his opposition to abortion: McCain, unlike George W. Bush, has called for the overturning of *Roe*.) But, if the California decision makes things even marginally more difficult for Barack Obama, it could set back the broader national cause of gay marriage for decades to come. With at least two U.S. Supreme Court appointments, President Obama could lay the foundation for a Court that might eventually nationalize gay marriage once the country is ready. A McCain Court, by contrast, could ensure that gay marriage continues to be fought from state to state for several generations. As Klarman puts it, "If the California gay marriage decision makes it harder for Barack Obama, it's hard for me to believe that it's desirable for supporters of gay marriage to insist on it." My heart is with my colleague Richard Just, whose eloquent response follows, but my head tells me that courts have often delayed the cause of justice when they have attempted to impose contested reforms before the country is willing to accept them.

Jeffrey Rosen

Justice Delivered

Why California got it right.

It wasn't exactly a shock when conservatives greeted last week's decision by the California Supreme Court legalizing gay marriage with their usual denunciations of "activist judges" and the "imperial judiciary." And it's easy to understand why conservatives dislike court-imposed progress on gay rights, since most would prefer that progress on gay rights didn't happen at all. More interesting has been the reaction of liberals who *do* support gay rights but who have nevertheless sharply criticized the decision. *The Washington Post* editorial page, for instance, called the ruling "an unnecessary bout of judicial micromanagement," while, in this issue of The New Republic, my colleague Jeffrey Rosen questions "the wisdom of imposing gay marriage by judicial fiat." According to this view, progress on gay rights should take place through state legislatures and governors, not through the courts.

Liberals who advance this argument are essentially making two points—one strategic, the other normative. First, they worry that securing gay marriage via judicial intervention will lead to a public backlash. Second, they contend that there is something undemocratic about judges reinterpreting state constitutions to arrive at conclusive judgments on hot-button social issues. Both arguments carry a certain logical appeal. But neither, upon closer examination, is particularly persuasive.

Take the strategic argument first. Four years ago, when Massachusetts began marrying gay couples after a ruling by its state supreme court, there was plenty of similar hand-wringing about the alleged backlash to come. But, in a piece she wrote for TNR at the time, journalist E.J. Graff predicted that the decision was unlikely to spark a backlash. In fact, she wrote that it was likely to solidify an emerging consensus *in favor* of gay marriage. That's because gay marriage is much more threatening in theory than in practice. Conservative arguments against gay marriage rest on dire predictions about how it will tear apart the country's social fabric. Once gay marriage is a reality and those predictions don't come true, the arguments against it start to look silly at best, cruel at worst. E.J.'s argument was vindicated in Massachusetts. In February 2004, according to *The Boston Globe*, a majority of residents (53 percent) opposed gay marriage; by March 2005, just ten months after gay marriages began taking place, a majority (56 percent) supported them. Why did so many people change their minds? I'm guessing many went through the same evolution as the Massachusetts legislator who explained why he switched sides on same-sex marriage in the years after the court made it legal: "I couldn't take away the happiness those people have been able to enjoy."

What about the backlash outside of Massachusetts? What about all those state constitutional amendments that passed in 2004 banning gay marriage? There's no doubt that the Massachusetts decision helped to motivate anti–gay marriage activists in the rest of the country. But the idea that gay marriage opponents were angered primarily by the way that decision was reached rather than the substance of the outcome is absurd. If gay marriage had arrived in Massachusetts at the behest of state legislators rather than judges, would gay marriage opponents in the rest of the country really have been any less annoyed? Of course not. No matter how gay marriage comes about, it's going to anger and discomfit some people. The idea that such people would be mollified by a different process seems more than a little unrealistic.

But it's the normative objections to the California decision that bother me most—the idea put forward by some commentators that winning gay marriage through the courts rather than through the legislative process is somehow a form of cheating. Is progress in a democracy somehow purer or more legitimate if it does not involve the judiciary? I can understand the appeal of this idea: Let the voters arrive at a consensus themselves; let the politicians do the voters' bidding; this is how democracy is supposed to work—end of story. But this is *not* how democracy works, at least not our democracy. Progress does not always happen perfectly in our country, and, if we demand that progress only happen in certain ways, we set ourselves up for a situation in which progress cannot happen at all. Most dramatic

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leaps forward in our country's history—and the gay rights revolution is one such leap—have happened through a combination of forces. They have neither been imposed solely from above nor driven solely from below. They have generally involved the work of courts, of legislators, of governors, and of faceless bureaucrats. Because their jobs carry different responsibilities, these actors rarely pull in precisely the same direction, and, on certain questions, some may rightly prove more influential than others. But to argue that judges have no role to play in one of the key issues of our time—to pretend that state constitutions, not to mention centuries of accumulated legal precedent, have *nothing* to say on the question of whether it is permissible for government to treat gays and lesbians as second-class citizens—defies any rational understanding of the way a constitutional democracy is supposed to work.

The California Supreme Court did not rule in a vacuum. For one thing, its decision comes in the midst of a generation-long shift in the way Americans view homosexuality. What was once viewed as a mental disorder is today widely recognized as a normal human attribute. More concretely, the court did not act in a political vacuum. The legislature has twice passed bills to legalize gay marriage, and one of the state's largest cities had been performing gay marriages before the courts ordered it to stop. What the California Supreme Court was doing last week was not judicial imperialism. It was simply taking a moral consensus that is clearly emerging, and applying it to the state's constitution.

Indeed, if you read the 120-page-plus decision itself, you can see the powerful and rather simple thinking behind what the court did. Critics have suggested that the decision is overly expansive or poorly reasoned. In fact, its logic is relatively straightforward. First, the court established that an implicit right to marry has long been recognized in California law. Then it established that inherent in this right to marry is a right to the dignity and respect that comes with marriage—a right that California's "domestic partnership" law could not fully afford. The court then distinguished between two standards of judicial review: a "rational basis" standard, which allows the court to strike down a measure only if it serves no legitimate purpose; and a "strict scrutiny" standard, which the court applies to laws concerning "suspect classifications," such as race and gender, and which allows the court to strike down a measure if the state cannot show that it is needed to achieve a compelling interest. Does sexual orientation constitute a suspect classification? It is not exactly analogous to race or gender, but it is comparable in two key respects: First, people do not choose to be gay, just as people do not choose to be black or female. And second, discrimination against gays and lesbians has been both widespread and institutional throughout American history. None of this should be controversial, and it is exactly what the court concluded. Having established that sexual orientation constitutes a suspect classification and is therefore subject to strict scrutiny, it was relatively easy for the court to conclude that the state had no compelling interest in excluding gays and lesbians from marriage. After all, the supposition that denying marriage rights to gays will somehow preserve the institution's dignity for everyone else is hardly a persuasive argument.

Anyone who has ever looked at a poll on gay issues that disaggregates the responses by age knows how the story of gay marriage is going to end. What no one knows is *when* it is going to end. Had the California Supreme Court let the state's political process grind forward—its obligation to interpret the state's constitution be damned—how long would it have taken for the state's gays and lesbians to win their marriage rights? Perhaps it would have taken only a year. But what if it had taken ten years? Or even a generation? Meanwhile, stuck waiting patiently would have been the million-plus gay and lesbian Californians who want to live as first-class citizens, not in some theoretical, distant day to come, when the maddeningly slow work of legislators and governors finally delivers the outcome via means that we might regard as ever so slightly more democratic—but now, right now.

If courts, by interpreting state or federal constitutions in light of the country's changing mores on homosexuality, can hasten the day when gays and lesbians throughout the country fully enjoy the fundamental rights they are owed, then I, for one, am not going to quibble. Yes, if I were drawing things up from scratch, I might marginally prefer to have gay marriage enacted by legislatures, not by courts. But history is not drawn up from scratch. And, sometimes, waiting for the perfect process means waiting much too long.

Richard Just

ANTHONY RUSSO

Happy Returns

On Israel's sixtieth.

As Theodor Herzl actually prophesied, it would take half a century for the Jewish state to be created. Toward the end of that period, the people for whose very lives it was being formed lost one-third of its number to Nazism, an organic expression from the history of Western civilization. But to the Zionists belonged the credit for grasping that Europe—liberal, enlightened, increasingly bourgeois—was doomed territory for the Jews.

It cannot be denied that the return of half the Jews dispersed in the world to what is now Israel is unprecedented, and the revival of an antique prayer-language into a Hebrew both resonant and innovative is no less revolutionary. Add to these the realization of the essential conditions of serious democracies: civilian primacy over military power; the rule of independent legal institutions; an utterly free (and obstreperous) press; a plural society of religious, irreligious, and the utterly indifferent; an indigenous culture open to foreign cultures; the viability of moral values at odds with positivist fact; a scientific ethos at once triumphant yet skeptical of its own achievements; a technological foundation to its modern economy which still leaves space for the ethical critique of its market.

In contrast to these achievements—but not only in contrast—the surrounding world of the Arabs is a functional and philosophical calamity. There are deep riches in this orbit, but its wealth has only magnified the differences between the entitled and the crowd, perhaps more accurately put, the mob.

Though the Palestinians are not the poorest of the Arabs, their political development has shriveled. From the start, they passively exported their struggle against the Jews to covetous Arab states, themselves at odds over Palestine. They did not take up the U.N. partition plan, which allotted them a state that would now also be celebrating its sixtieth anniversary. Other Arabs

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signed for them the cease-fire agreements ending Israel's independence war. The wars of 1967 and 1973 were fought not on behalf of the Palestinians but to secure additional territory for Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. It's hard to tell whether the Palestinians still believe in the phantom of one Arab people, in pursuit of which various Arab states teamed up and broke up as if playing a game of tag.

The powers have assigned themselves the overvalued chore of making peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and they believe if only they could happen upon some truly ingenuous formula an accord would be had. This is a delusion. The Palestinians are as much and as little a nation as the warring tribes and clans of Africa and Pakistan. They have to make peace among themselves before they can even conceive of peace with Israel. Israel is not responsible for its neighbors. It is responsible for itself, and of itself it can be proud.

MARTIN PERETZ

Department of Recriminations

The Clinton camp turns on itself.

For the edification of our readers, we asked (begged, really) a range of anonymous Hillarylanders—more than a dozen, from high-level advisers to grunt-level assistants—for lists of "What Went Wrong?" Here it is, an elegy for Hillary '08, written by those who worked tirelessly to keep it alive.

"Bottom line: I just don't think she was hungry enough for it in the beginning. It wasn't really until the ten-in-a-row loss that she started doing stuff like 'Saturday Night Live' and Jon Stewart. In the beginning, it was hard to get her to do those things."

"Clearly, [Obama] was a phenomenon. He was tapping something really different than anyone had ever seen before. . . . I just think they should have really gone after him back in the summer and in the fall. I know it would have been a difficult decision to make back then: She's the leader of the party, the standard bearer, the big dog. Everyone thinks she's gonna win and walk away with it. Why go picking on Barack Obama? But that's just something the campaign should have done sooner."

"Devastating vulnerabilities such as Obama's associations with [Jeremiah] Wright and [Bill] Ayers were not unearthed by the campaign's vaunted research team in time to be fully taken advantage of—despite being readily available in the public domain."

"Hillary assembled a team thin on presidential campaign experience that confused discipline with insularity; they didn't know what they didn't know and were too arrogant to ask at a time early enough in the process when it could have made a difference, effectively shutting out even some long-time Hillaryland loyalists. Her innermost circle of [Patti Solis] Doyle, [Mark] Penn, [Mandy] Grunwald, [Neera] Tanden, and [Howard] Wolfson formed a board of directors with no single chairman or CEO; nobody was truly in charge, nobody held truly accountable."

"We would just cringe. Ugh. Such an out-of-touch corporate-run kind of campaign—exactly what you'd expect from Mark Penn. He did fine during his time in the Clinton White House. But running a campaign to capture the nomination in a change environment is something he had never done. Just look at what he did for Joe Lieberman!"

DAVID COWLES

"[Bill's] behavior that started off in Iowa, carried on in New Hampshire, and culminated in South Carolina really was the beginning of the end. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, he just kind of imploded. I think, if I had to look back on it, it became more about him than about her. It really was destructive overall."

"There were more themes in this campaign than anything I've ever seen."

"There were a number of people who advised the Clinton campaign back in the spring of '07 that this could easily become a longer battle—a war of attrition. She needed to build a broad base of supporters beyond the virtually limitless number of Clinton friends and supporters who they counted on to not only max out, but to use their not inconsiderable Rolodexes to help her. That would have been fine if this thing had ended Super Tuesday. It didn't, and she ran out of money."

"There was financial mismanagement bordering on fraud. A candidate who raised more than a quarter of a billion *dollars over the years had to pump in millions more of her own money to stave off bankruptcy."*

"I don't think anybody in America doesn't think she can do the job. What they're dying for is to know a little bit more about her. And we were unable to present that side of her."

"Mark Penn and Mandy Grunwald dismissed the possibility of youth turning out heavily in Iowa for Obama, saying on the record after the Jefferson-Jackson dinner, 'They don't look like caucus-goers.'"

"We ran a press operation that lost all credibility with the press through endless and pointless memos like 'Where's the Bounce?' and polling memos that cherry-picked only positive polls when we were up and ignored polling when we were down."

"Her people spent all of 2008 making lists blaming each other (but never themselves) rather than lists of solutions."

MICHELLE COTTLE

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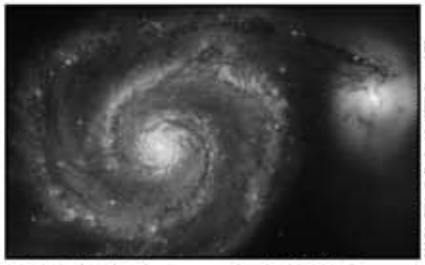

NASA, ESA, S. Beckwith (STScI), and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI/AURA)

The Whirlpool Galaxy, as seen by the Hubble Space Telescope, is about 25 million light-years away from us.

been stretched, the planets and Earth formed, and 70 percent of Earth species wiped out by a gigantic asteroid—clearing the way for the evolution of humanity.

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The Unraveling

Al Qaeda's revolt against bin Laden.

PETER BERGEN AND PAUL CRUICKSHANK

Within a few minutes of Noman Benotman's arrival at the Kandahar guest house, Osama bin Laden came to welcome him. The journey from Kabul had been hard, 17 hours in a Toyota pickup truck bumping along what passed as the main highway to southern Afghanistan. It was the summer of 2000, and Benotman, then a leader of a group trying to overthrow the Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi, had been invited by bin Laden to a conference of jihadists from around the Arab world, the first of its kind since Al Qaeda had moved to Afghanistan in 1996. Benotman, the scion of an aristocratic family marginalized by Qaddafi, had known bin Laden from their days fighting the Afghan communist government in the early '90s, a period when Benotman established himself as a leader of the militant Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

The night of Benotman's arrival, bin Laden threw a lavish banquet in the main hall of his compound, an unusual extravagance for the frugal Al Qaeda leader. As bin Laden circulated, making small talk, large dishes of rice and platters of whole roasted lamb were served to some 200 jihadists, many of whom had come from around the Middle East. "It was one big reunification," Benotman recalls. "The leaders of most of the jihadist groups in the Arab world were there and almost everybody within Al Qaeda."

Bin Laden was trying to win over other militant groups to the global jihad he had announced against the United States in 1998. Over the next five days, bin Laden and his top aides, including Ayman Al Zawahiri, met with a dozen or so jihadist leaders. They sat on the floor in a circle with large cushions arrayed around them to discuss the future of their movement. "This was a big strategy meeting," Benotman told one of us late last year, in his first account of the meeting to a reporter. "We talked about everything, where are we going, what are the lessons of the past twenty years."

Despite the warm welcome, Benotman surprised his hosts with a bleak assessment of their prospects. "I told them that the jihadist movement had failed. That we had gone from one disaster to another, like in Algeria, because we had not mobilized the people," recalls Benotman, referring to the Algerian civil war launched by jihadists in the '90s that left more than 100,000 dead and destroyed whatever local support the mili-

Matt Bandsuch

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tants had once enjoyed. Benotman also told bin Laden that the Al Qaeda leader's decision to target the United States would only sabotage attempts by groups like Benotman's to overthrow the secular dictatorships in the Arab world. "We made a clear-cut request for him to stop his campaign against the United States because it was going to lead to nowhere," Benotman recalls, "but they laughed when I told them that America would attack the whole region if they launched another attack against it."

Benotman says that bin Laden tried to placate him with a promise: "I have one more operation, and after that I will quit"—an apparent reference to September 11. "I can't call this one back because that would demoralize the whole organization," Benotman remembers bin Laden saying.

After the attacks, Benotman, now living in London, resigned from the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, realizing that the United States, in its war on terrorism, would differentiate little between Al Qaeda and his organization.

Benotman, however, did more than just retire. In January 2007, under a veil of secrecy, he flew to Tripoli in a private jet chartered by the Libyan government to try to persuade the imprisoned senior leadership of his former group to enter into peace negotiations with the regime. He was successful. This May, Benotman told us that the two parties could be as little as three months away from an agreement that would see the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group formally end its operations in Libya and denounce Al Qaeda's global jihad. At that point, the group would also publicly refute recent claims by Al Qaeda that the two organizations had joined forces.

This past November, Benotman went public with his own criticism of Al Qaeda in an open letter to Zawahiri, absorbed and well-received, he says, by the jihadist leaders in Tripoli. In the letter, Benotman recalled his Kandahar warnings and called on Al Qaeda to end all operations in Arab countries and in the West. The citizens of Western countries were blameless and should not be the target of terrorist attacks, argued Benotman, his refined English accent, smart suit, trimmed beard, and easygoing demeanor making it hard to imagine that he was once on the front lines in Afghanistan.

Although Benotman's public rebuke of Al Qaeda went unnoticed in the United States, it received wide attention in the Arabic press. In repudiating Al Qaeda, Benotman was adding his voice to a rising tide of anger in the Islamic world toward Al Qaeda and its affiliates, whose victims since September 11 have mostly been fellow Muslims. Significantly, he was also joining a larger group of religious scholars, former fighters, and militants who had once had great influence over Al Qaeda's leaders, and who—alarmed by the targeting of civilians in the West, the senseless killings in Muslim countries, and Al Qaeda's barbaric tactics in Iraq—have turned against the organization, many just in the past year.

After September 11, there was considerable fear in the West that we were headed for a clash of civilizations with the Muslim world led by bin Laden, who would entice masses of young Muslims into his jihadist movement. But the religious leaders and former militants who are now critiquing Al Qaeda's terrorist campaign—both in the Middle East and in Muslim enclaves in the West—make that less likely. The potential repercussions for Al Qaeda cannot be underestimated because, unlike most mainstream Muslim leaders, Al Qaeda's new critics have the jihadist credentials to make their criticisms bite. "The starting point has to be that jihad is legitimate, otherwise no one will listen," says Benotman, who sees the Iraqi insurgency as a legitimate jihad. "The reaction [to my criticism of Al Qaeda] has been beyond imagination. It has made the radicals very angry. They are very shaky about it."

Why have clerics and militants once considered allies by Al Qaeda's leaders turned against them? To a large extent, it is because Al Qaeda and its affiliates have increasingly adopted the doctrine of *takfir*, by which they claim the right to decide who is a "true" Muslim. Al Qaeda's Muslim critics know what results from this *takfiri* view: First, the radicals deem some Muslims apostates; after that, the radicals start killing them. This fatal progression happened in both Algeria and Egypt in the 1990s. It is now taking place even more dramatically in Iraq, where Al Qaeda's suicide bombers have killed more than 10,000 Iraqis, most of them targeted simply for being Shia. Recently, Al Qaeda in Iraq has turned its fire on Sunnis who oppose its diktats, a fact not lost on the Islamic world's Sunni majority.

Additionally, Al Qaeda and its affiliates have killed thousands of Muslim civilians elsewhere since September 11: hundreds of ordinary Afghans killed every year by the Taliban, dozens of Saudis killed by terrorists since 2003, scores of Jordanians massacred at a wedding at a U.S. hotel in Amman in November 2005. Even those sympathetic to Al Qaeda have started to notice. "Excuse me Mr. Zawahiri but who is it who is killing with Your Excellency's blessing, the innocents in Baghdad, Morocco and Algeria?" one supporter asked in an online Q&A with Al Qaeda's deputy leader in April that was posted widely on jihadist websites. All this has created a dawning recognition among Muslims that the ideological virus that unleashed September 11 and the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid is the same virus now wreaking havoc in the Muslim world.

Two months before Benotman's letter to Zawahiri was publicized in the Arab press, Al Qaeda received a blow from one of bin Laden's erstwhile heroes, Sheikh Salman Al Oudah, a Saudi religious scholar. Around the sixth anniversary of September 11, Al Oudah addressed Al Qaeda's leader on MBC, a widely watched Middle East TV network: "My brother Osama, how much blood has been spilt? How many innocent people, children, elderly, and women have been killed … in the name of Al Qaeda? Will you be happy to meet God Almighty carrying the burden of these hundreds of thousands or millions [of victims] on your back?"

What was noteworthy about Al Oudah's statement was that it was not simply a condemnation of terrorism, or even of September 11, but that it was a *personal* rebuke, which clerics in the Muslim world have shied away from. In Saudi Arabia in February, one of us met with Al Oudah, who rarely speaks to Western reporters. Dressed in the long black robe fringed with gold that is worn by those accorded respect in Saudi society, Al Oudah recalled meeting with bin Laden—a "simple man without scholarly religious credentials, an attractive personality who spoke well," he said—in the northern Saudi region of Qassim in 1990. Al Oudah explained that he had criticized Al Qaeda for years but until now had not directed it at bin Laden himself: "Most religious scholars have directed criticism at acts of terrorism, not a particular person. … I don't expect a positive effect on bin Laden personally as a result of my statement. It's really a message to his followers."

Al Oudah's rebuke was also significant because he is considered one of the fathers of the *Sahwa*, the fundamentalist awakening movement that swept through Saudi Arabia in the '80s. His sermons against the U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia following Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait helped turn bin Laden against the United States. And bin Laden told one of us in 1997 that

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Al Oudah's 1994 imprisonment by the Saudi regime was one of the reasons he was calling for attacks on U.S. targets. Al Oudah is also one of 26 Saudi clerics who, in 2004, handed down a religious ruling urging Iraqis to fight the U.S. occupation of their country. He is, in short, not someone Al Qaeda can paint as an American sympathizer or a tool of the Saudi government.

Tellingly, Al Qaeda has not responded to Al Oudah's critique, but the research organization Political Islam Online tracked postings on six Islamist websites and the websites of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya TV networks in the week after Al Oudah's statements; it found that more than two-thirds of respondents reacted favorably. Al Oudah's large youth following in the Muslim world has helped his anti–Al Qaeda message resonate. In 2006, for instance, he addressed a gathering of around 20,000 young British Muslims in London's East End. "Oudah is well known by all the youth. It's almost a celebrity culture out there. . . . He has definitely helped to offset Al Qaeda's rhetoric," one young imam told us.

More doubt about Al Qaeda was planted in the Muslim world when Sayyid Imam Al Sharif, the ideological godfather of Al Qaeda, sensationally withdrew his support in a book written last year from his prison cell in Cairo. Al Sharif, generally known as "Dr. Fadl," was an architect of the doctrine of *takfir*, arguing that Muslims who did not support armed jihad or who participated in elections were *kuffar*, unbelievers. Although Dr. Fadl never explicitly called for such individuals to be killed, his *takfiri* treatises from 1988 and 1993 gave theological cover to jihadists targeting civilians.

Dr. Fadl was also Zawahiri's mentor. Like his protégé, he is a skilled surgeon and moved in militant circles when he was a member of Cairo University's medical faculty in the '70s. In 1981, when Anwar Sadat was assassinated and Zawahiri was jailed in connection with the plot, Dr. Fadl fled to Peshawar, Pakistan, where he operated on wounded mujahedin fighting the Soviets. After Zawahiri's release from jail, he joined Dr. Fadl in Peshawar, where they established a new branch of the "Jihad group" that would later morph into Al Qaeda. Osama Rushdi, a former Egyptian jihadist then living in Peshawar, recalls that there was little doubt about Dr. Fadl's importance: "He was like the big boss in the Mafia in Chicago." And bin Laden also owed a deeply personal debt to Dr. Fadl; in Sudan in 1993, the doctor operated on Al Qaeda's leader after he was hurt in an assassination attempt.

So it was an unwelcome surprise for Al Qaeda's leaders when Dr. Fadl's new book, *Rationalization of Jihad*, was serialized in an independent Egyptian newspaper in November. The incentive for writing the book, he explained, was that "jihad . . . was blemished with grave Sharia violations during recent years. . . . [N]ow there are those who kill hundreds, including women and children, Muslims and non Muslims in the name of Jihad!" Dr Fadl ruled that Al Qaeda's bombings in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere were illegitimate and that terrorism against civilians in Western countries was wrong. He also took on Al Qaeda's leaders directly in an interview with the *Al Hayat* newspaper. "Zawahiri and his Emir bin Laden [are] extremely immoral," he said. "I have spoken about this in order to warn the youth against them, youth who are seduced by them, and don't know them."

Dr. Fadl's harsh words attracted attention throughout the Arabic-speaking world; even a majority of Zawahiri's own Jihad group jailed in Egyptian prisons signed on and promised to end their armed struggle. In December, Zawahiri released an audiotape lambasting his former mentor, accusing him of being in league with the "bloodthirsty betrayer" Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; and, in a 200-page book titled *The Exoneration*, published in March, he replied at greater length, portraying Dr. Fadl as a prisoner trying to curry favor with Egypt's security services and the author of "a desperate attempt (under American sponsorship) to confront the high tide of the jihadist awakening."

Ultimately, the ideological battle against Al Qaeda in the West may be won in places such as Leyton and Walthamstow, largely Muslim enclaves in east London, whose residents included five of the eight alleged British Al Qaeda operatives currently on trial for plotting to bring down U.S.-bound passenger jets in 2006. It is in Britain that many leaders of the jihadist movement have settled as political refugees, and "Londonistan" has long been a key barometer of future Islamist trends. There are probably more supporters of Al Qaeda in Britain than any other Western country, and, because most British Muslims are of Pakistani origin, British militants easily can obtain terrorist training in the tribal areas of Pakistan, Al Qaeda's main operational hub since September 11. And now, because it is difficult for Al Qaeda to send Middle Eastern passport holders to the United States, the organization has particularly targeted radicalized Muslims in Britain for recruitment. So the nexus between militant British Muslims, Pakistan, and Al Qaeda has become the leading terrorist threat to the United States.

Over the last half-year, we have made several trips to London to interview militants who have defected from Al Qaeda, retired mujahedin, Muslim community leaders, and members of the security services. Most say that, when Al Qaeda's bombs went off in London in 2005, sympathy for the terrorists evaporated.

In Leyton, the neighborhood mosque is on the main road, a street of terraced houses, halal food joints, and South Asian hairdressers. Around 1,000 people attend Friday prayers there each week.

Usama Hassan, one of the imams at the mosque, has a Ph.D. in artificial intelligence from Imperial College in London, read theoretical physics at Cambridge, and now teaches at Middlesex University. But he also trained in a jihadist camp in Afghanistan in the '90s and, until a few years ago, was openly supportive of bin Laden. And, in another unusual twist, he is now one of the most prominent critics of Al Qaeda. Over several cups of Earl Grey in the tea room next to the mosque, Hassan—loquacious and intelligent, every bit the university lecturer—explained how he had switched sides.

Raised in London by Pakistani parents, Hassan arrived in Cambridge in 1989 and, feeling culturally isolated, fell in with Jamiat Ihyaa Minhaaj Al Sunnah (JIMAS), a student organization then supportive of jihads in Palestine, Kashmir, and Afghanistan. In December 1990, Hassan traveled to Afghanistan, where he briefly attended an Arab jihadist camp. He was shown how to use Kalashnikovs and M-16s and was taken to the front lines, where a shell landed near his group's position. "My feeling was, if I was killed, then brilliant, I would be a martyr," he recalls. Later, as a post-graduate student in London, Hassan played a lead role in the student Islamic Society, then a hotbed of radical activism. "At the time I was very anti-American. . . . It was all black and white for us. I used to be impressed with bin Laden. There was no other leadership in the Muslim world standing up for Muslims." When September 11 happened, Hassan says the view in his circle was that "Al Qaeda had given one back to George Bush."

ANTHONY RUSSO

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For decades, the declared thrust of the Palestinians has been their desire of having their own state – in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and in the Gaza Strip. Now, a new idea has taken hold and is propagated in national media: a binational state, encompassing those territories and "Israel proper." The slogan is "One Land for Two Peoples."

What are the facts?

Review of history: The Arabs have launched four major wars against Israel, at the end of which Israel remained in possession of all the lands west of the Jordan River, the undivided city of Jerusalem, the vast Sinai, the Golan Heights and the Gaza Strip. In what was in all likelihood a major act of folly, but in order to attain peace with Egypt, Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt. But the peace with Egypt is the coldest imaginable.

Thus, having been unable to defeat Israel in war and unable to wear it down by their "intifadas," the Arabs had to think up something new in order to destroy Israel. And they did indeed come up with something. According to the late and unlamented Yasser Arafat, the most important weapon of the Arabs is the "Arab womb," the motto being: "If we can't defeat them in war, let's outbreed them." And that is exactly what would happen if there ever were a "binational" state. There can be little doubt that, within a generation or less, the Arabs would have outbred their Jewish fellow citizens and would have become the majority in the country. They would thus have accomplished what they were unable to attain by any other means, namely the destruction of the Jewish state.

Artificial countries: With the exception of Egypt, all the countries of the Middle East are artificial creations. After World War I, England and France carved up the Ottoman Empire, with England retaining what are now Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Iraq, and France being in possession of what are now Syria and Lebanon.

In 1917, the Balfour Declaration, proclaimed by the British mandatory power, established all of Palestine – east and west of the Jordan River – as the reconstituted homeland for the Jewish people. This was ratified by the 52 countries of the League of Nations. Insistence that these are Arab lands and that the Jews are "occupiers" is a notion that is fairly new. But it has been repeated so often and for so long that most of the world has come to believe it. But it has no basis in fact at all. It is a myth.

If Israel were ever to consent to the creation of a binational state, how would it work out? To get the answer, one only needs to go next door to Lebanon. In order to provide a safe haven for the Maronite Christians, the French carved out the artificial state of Lebanon. Within just one generation, the population ratio had begun to change in favor of the Muslims. Strife broke out, which ultimately culminated in a bloody civil war that lasted for close to ten years and in which scores of thousands died. Can anybody really believe that, given the mortal hatred of the Muslims against the Jews, things would be any different in Israel/Palestine? Of course not! A bloody civil war would be the inevitable result.

> "The Palestinians, just as the over one million Arabs now living in Israel with full rights as citizens, could be part of Israel, with full autonomy and with their own internal governance…"

Created as a Jewish state: Israel was created as a Jewish state by the will of the nations of the world and by the brain and brawn of the Jewish people. There is no reason why the Israelis would turn their country over to those who are their declared mortal enemies. Do the Turks plan to establish a binational state with the Kurds (or do the Iranians or Iraqis, for that matter)? Do the Spaniards consider a binational state with the Basques? Do the Chinese propose the formation of a binational state with the Tibetans? Of course not. Why, therefore, should Israel even consider sharing its country with those whose never-changing agenda is its destruction? Why should Israel, one of the most advanced countries in the world in virtually every field of endeavor, make itself hostage to those who live in backwardness and ignorance and who are guided by religious fanaticism? Israel was founded to be the Jewish homeland and it will never acquiesce to its own destruction by allowing itself to become a binational state.

A binational state is a non-starter and, realistically, a Palestinian state in any portion of Judea/Samaria and Gaza (even in the unlikely case that the Israelis were ever willing to concede it) would not be viable. What then is the possible solution to this enduring problem? The Palestinians, just as the over one million Arabs now living in Israel with full rights as citizens, could be part of Israel, with full autonomy and with their own internal governance (something that the Kurds would give anything to attain). If they were unhappy with that solution they would be at liberty to migrate to any of the over twenty Arab countries that, one would hope, would welcome them with open arms.

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Still, as Al Qaeda continued to target civilians for attacks, Hassan began to rethink. His employment by an artificial-intelligence consulting firm also integrated him back toward mainstream British life. "It was a slow process and involved a lot of soul-searching. … Over time, I became convinced that bin Laden was dangerous and an extremist." The July 2005 bombings in London were the clincher. "I was devastated by the attack," he says. "My feeling was, how dare they attack my city."

Three days after the London bombings, the Leyton mosque held an emergency meeting; about 300 people attended. "We explained that these acts were evil, that they were *haram*," recalls Hassan. It was not the easiest of crowds; one youngster stormed out, shouting, "As far as I'm concerned, fifty dead *kuffar* is not a problem."

In Friday sermons since then, Hassan says that he has hammered home the difference between legitimate jihad and terrorism, despite a death threat from pro–Al Qaeda militants: "I think I'm listened to by the young because I have street cred from having spent time in a [jihadist] training camp. … Jihadist experience is especially important for young kids because otherwise they tend to think he is just a sell-out who is a lot of talk." This spring, Hassan helped launch the Quilliam Foundation, an organization set up by former Islamist extremists to counter radicalism by making speeches to young Muslims in Great Britain about how they had been duped into embracing hatred of the West.

Such counter-radicalization efforts will help lower the pool of potential recruits for Al Qaeda—the only way the organization can be defeated in the long term. But the reality facing British counterterrorism officials, such as Detective Inspector Robert Lambert, the recently departed head of the Metropolitan police's Muslim Contact Unit, is that "Al Qaeda values dozens of recruits more than hundreds of supporters." In order to target the most radical extremists, the Metropolitan police have backed the efforts of a Muslim community group, the Active Change Foundation, based around a gym in Walthamstow run by Hanif and Imtiaz Qadir, two brothers of Kashmiri descent.

Hanif Qadir, now 42, revealed to us that he himself was recruited by Al Qaeda after the U.S. overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Jihadist recruiters in east London, no doubt noting wealth, sought out Qadir, who had earned enough money running a car repair shop to buy a Rolls-Royce and live in some style. "The guy who handled me was a Syrian called Abu Sufiyan. … I'm sure he was from Al Qaeda," recalls Qadir. "He was good at telling you what you wanted to hear … he touched all my emotional buttons." Qadir agreed to join. He drew up a will and, in December 2002, bought a first-class ticket to Pakistan. But, as the truck he was in crossed the dirt roads into Afghanistan, a chance occurrence changed his life: A truck, carrying wounded fighters, approached them from the other direction. Among them was a young Punjabi boy whose white robes were stained with blood. "These are evil people," another of the wounded shouted. "[W]e came here to fight jihad, but they are just using us as cannon fodder." Qadir's truckload of wannabe jihadists made a U-turn. "That kid, he was like an angel. He kicked me back into reality," recalls Qadir. "When I landed back in the U.K., I wanted to find [the Al Qaeda recruiters] and cut their heads off."

Qadir never found them, but he became determined to stop others like him from being recruited. In 2004, he and his brother opened the gym and community center in the Walthamstow neighborhood of east London. Soon, hundreds of young Muslims were attending.

The scale of the challenge was quickly clear. Soon after the center opened, he got wind that pro–Al Qaeda militants were secretly booking rooms there for their meetings. Worse, in the summer of 2006, several of those arrested in connection with the Al Qaeda airlines plot, including alleged ringleader Abdulla Ahmed Ali, were found to have attended his gym. But, rather than shutting the radicals out, Qadir continued to allow them to meet. "Sometimes our youngsters get into debates with these people, for example on jihad, and make them look ridiculous in front of their followers," he says. Qadir believes his approach is finally starting to pay off: "The extremists are burning out: The number of radicals in Walthamstow is diminishing, not growing."

At another mosque in London, the Muslim Brotherhood joined forces with the British authorities to reclaim the institution from pro–Al Qaeda militants. The Brotherhood is the most powerful Islamist group in the Arab world, with chapters throughout Europe and North America. It has long opposed Al Qaeda's jihad, a stance that so angered Zawahiri that he published a book, *The Bitter Harvest*, condemning the organization in 1991. From the late '90s, the Finsbury Park mosque in London had been dominated by the pro–Al Qaeda cleric Abu Hamza Al Masri. During that time, few self-respecting jihadists traveling through London passed up the free accommodation in its basement. Visitors included Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called "twentieth hijacker" of the September 11 plot, and Richard Reid, who tried to down a U.S.-bound airliner with a shoe bomb in December 2001.

In 2003, British police shut the mosque, but Abu Hamza's followers continued to have a strong presence in the area. In February 2005, police helped broker a deal for the mosque to re-open under the leadership of the local chapter of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), a Muslim Brotherhood group. No sooner had the moderates gained control of the Finsbury Park mosque than they were confronted by Abu Hamza's angry followers, led by the pugnacious Atilla Ahmet, who calls himself "the number-one Al Qaeda in Europe" and who, in October, pled guilty to providing British Muslims with terrorist training. "They brought sticks and knives with them," recalls Kamal El Helbawy, spokesman for the new trustees at the mosque.

Undeterred, a few days later Helbawy gave the first Friday sermon, explaining that this was a new start for the mosque and stressing how important it was for Muslims to live in harmony with their neighbors. Detective Inspector Lambert, the Metropolitan police officer who helped broker the takeover, says that, because of its social welfare work and its track record supporting the Palestinian cause, the MAB has "big street cred in the area and [has] made an impact on Abu Hamza's young followers."

Salman Al Oudah, the Saudi preacher, spoke at the re-opened mosque in 2006, as has Abdullah Anas, an Algerian former mujahedin fighter based in London who has been a critic of Al Qaeda for years. Anas worked with bin Laden in Pakistan during the '80s, fought in Afghanistan for almost a decade against the communists, and married the daughter of a Palestinian cleric who is still lionized as the spiritual godfather of the jihadist movement, the most radical wing of which would morph into Al Qaeda. Anas told us that his critiques of Al Qaeda were not well-received in 2003, but that, "in the last two or three years, there has been a change

ANTHONY RUSSO

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in opinion," citing the Madrid and London bombings as turning points. In 2006, Anas went public with his criticisms of Al Qaeda, in an interview with *Asharq Al Awsat*, one of the leading newspapers in the Arab world, criticizing the London subway bombings as "criminal deeds … prohibited by the Sharia."

Detective Inspector Lambert told us preachers like Anas and Al Oudah "can't be discounted. … When you have Muslim leaders who are attacked both by Al Qaeda supporters and by commentators who oppose engagement [with Islamists], then they are in a useful position."

In December, Al Qaeda's campaign of violence reached new depths in the eyes of many Muslims, with a plot to launch attacks in Saudi Arabia while millions were gathered for the Hajj. Saudi security services arrested 28 Al Qaeda militants in Mecca, Medina, and Riyadh, whose targets allegedly included religious leaders critical of Al Qaeda, among them the Saudi Grand Mufti Sheikh Abd Al Aziz Al Sheikh, who responded to the plot by ruling that Al Qaeda operatives should be punished by execution, crucifixion, or exile. Plotting such attacks during the Hajj could not have been more counterproductive to Al Qaeda's cause, says Abdullah Anas, who was making the pilgrimage to Mecca himself. "People over there … were very angry. The feeling was, how was it possible for Muslims to do that? I still can't quite believe it myself. The mood was one of shock, real shock."

Is Al Qaeda going to dissipate as a result of the criticism from its former mentors and allies? Despite the recent internal criticism, probably not in the short term. As one of us reported in The New Republic early last year, Al Qaeda, on the verge of defeat in 2002, has regrouped and is now able to launch significant terrorist operations in Europe ("Where You Bin?" January 29, 2007). And, last summer, U.S. intelligence agencies judged that Al Qaeda had "regenerated its [U.S.] Homeland attack capability" in Pakistan's tribal areas. Since then, Al Qaeda and the Taliban have only entrenched their position further, launching a record number of suicide attacks in Pakistan in the past year. Afghanistan, Algeria, and Iraq also saw record numbers of suicide attacks in 2007 (though the group's capabilities have deteriorated in Iraq of late). Meanwhile, Al Qaeda is still able to find recruits in the West. In November, Jonathan Evans, the head of Britain's domestic intelligence agency MI5, said that record numbers of U.K. residents are now supportive of Al Qaeda, with around 2,000 posing a "direct threat to national security and public safety." That means that Al Qaeda will threaten the United States and its allies for many years to come.

However, encoded in the DNA of apocalyptic jihadist groups like Al Qaeda are the seeds of their own long-term destruction: Their victims are often Muslim civilians; they don't offer a positive vision of the future (but rather the prospect of Taliban-style regimes from Morocco to Indonesia); they keep expanding their list of enemies, including any Muslim who doesn't precisely share their world view; and they seem incapable of becoming politically successful movements because their ideology prevents them from making the real-world compromises that would allow them to engage in genuine politics.

Which means that the repudiation of Al Qaeda's leaders by its former religious, military, and political guides will help hasten the implosion of the jihadist terrorist movement. As Churchill remarked after the battle of El Alamein in 1942, which he saw as turning the tide in World War II, "[T]his is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

Noman Benotman, bin Laden's Libyan former companion-in-arms, assesses that Al Qaeda's recent resurgence, which he says has been fueled by the Iraq war, will not last. "There may be a wave of violence right now, but … in five years, Al Qaeda will be more isolated than ever. No one will give a toss about them." And, given the religio-ideological basis of Al Qaeda's jihad, the religious condemnation now being offered by scholars and fighters once close to the organization is arguably the most important development in stopping the group's spread since September 11. Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell tacitly acknowledged this in his yearly report to Congress in February, when he testified that, "Over the past year, a number of religious leaders and fellow extremists who once had significant influence with Al Qaeda have publicly criticized it and its affiliates for the use of violent tactics."

Most of these clerics and former militants, of course, have not suddenly switched to particularly progressive forms of Islam or fallen in love with the United States (all those we talked to saw the Iraqi insurgency as a defensive jihad), but their anti–Al Qaeda positions are making Americans safer. If this is a war of ideas, it is their ideas, not the West's, that matter. The U.S. government neither has the credibility nor the Islamic knowledge to effectively debate Al Qaeda's leaders, but the clerics and militants who have turned against them do. Juan Zarate, a former federal prosecutor and a key counterterrorism adviser to President Bush, acknowledged as much in a speech in April when he said, "These challenges from within Muslim communities and even extremist circles will be insurmountable at the end of the day for Al Qaeda."

These new critics, in concert with mainstream Muslim leaders, have created a powerful coalition countering Al Qaeda's ideology. According to Pew polls, support for Al Qaeda has been dropping around the Muslim world in recent years. The numbers supporting suicide bombings in Indonesia, Lebanon, and Bangladesh, for instance, have dropped by half or more in the last five years. In Saudi Arabia, only 10 percent now have a favorable view of Al Qaeda, according to a December poll by Terror Free Tomorrow, a Washington-based think tank. Following a wave of suicide attacks in Pakistan in the past year, support for suicide operations amongst Pakistanis has dropped to 9 percent (it was 33 percent five years ago), while favorable views of bin Laden in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, around where he is believed to be hiding, have plummeted to 4 percent from 70 percent since August 2007.

Unsurprisingly, Al Qaeda's leaders have been thrown on the defensive. In December, bin Laden released a tape that stressed that "the Muslim victims who fall during the operations against the infidel Crusaders … are not the intended targets." Bin Laden warned the former mujahedin now turning on Al Qaeda that, whatever their track records as jihadists, they had now committed one of the "nullifiers of Islam," which is helping the "infidels against the Muslims."

Kamal El Helbawy, the Muslim Brotherhood leader who helped bring in moderates at the Finsbury Park mosque in London, believes that Al Qaeda's days may be numbered: "No government, no police force, is achieving what these [religious] scholars are achieving. To defeat terrorism, to convince the radicals … you have to persuade them that theirs is not the path to paradise." ◆

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House Broker

Nancy Pelosi doesn't like to be threatened.

MICHELLE COTTLE

Nancy Pelosi believes in being direct. With the Democratic presidential contest running hot, in March a reporter with Boston TV station NECN asked the House speaker about the possibility of a dream ticket uniting Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Doe eyes wide, the nation's highest-ranking Democrat flashed her trademark smile ominously.

"I think that the Clinton administration [sic] has fairly ruled that out by proclaiming that Senator McCain would be a better [long pause, dismayed half-laugh] commander-in-chief than Obama. I think that ticket—either way—is impossible."

Pelosi turned to walk off, then retraced her steps and added, with another half-laugh, "I didn't want to leave you with any ambiguity."

Nope. No ambiguity here, say supporters of Team Hillary. As party elder and chairman of the upcoming Democratic convention, Pelosi maintains that she will not pick favorites in the nominating contest. But, as many of Hillary's people see it, Pelosi's repeated rejection of a "unity ticket" is just further proof that, official neutrality notwithstanding, the speaker wants Barack Obama to be the nominee—and will use her influence to make sure there is no place for Hillary on his ticket. Pelosi is "anything but uncommitted," insists one Hillary adviser, echoing colleagues.

Some Hillary folks believe that Pelosi assumes Obama would provide better coattails for down-ballot candidates to ride. Others think Hillary is considered too centrist to win Pelosi's love. Still others suspect the speaker has calculated that she'd have more influence under President Obama than President Clinton—partly because Obama has more limited Washington experience than Hillary and partly because, as the Hillary adviser snarks, under Clinton, Pelosi would lose the advantages that attend being "the most senior skirt in the land."

Pelosi's perceived offenses toward Hillary '08 range from her public call for superdelegates to respect the will of regular voters (a boon to Obama, with his pledged-delegate lead) to her choice of Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius to respond to Bush's State of the Union speech; the morning after her response, Sebelius endorsed Obama—something Hillary backers are convinced wouldn't have happened without the speaker's tacit blessing. With each new slight, Team Hillary aides grumble to Pelosi aides, while outside Hillary supporters—especially women and California voters—call the speaker's office to grouse. But, as the race grinds on, Pelosi continues to offend. Most recently, even as she assured *The Wall Street Journal* that she saw "plenty of freshness" in both candidates, the speaker couldn't help but add: "Some might say he's advocating what I've been advocating for a long time."

Under the circumstances, it's no surprise that some Hillary loyalists have grown bitter toward Pelosi. In April, nearly two dozen big-league Hillary donors, reacting to Pelosi's warning about superdelegates, fired off an open letter to the speaker, cautioning that, if she failed to "clarify" her position, they would have to reconsider their long-standing support of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. It was the desperate act of a desperate people. It was also, to Hillary's detriment, a stunningly ham-fisted move guaranteed to feed whatever bias Pelosi already had. Publicly, Pelosi dismissed the letter as "unimportant," even as her office made clear that she was brassed off about it. "It was," a Pelosi aide stressed to me of the effort, "a mistake on their part."

Don't let the perky-grandmother-in-pearls schtick deceive: Nancy Pelosi is not a woman who responds well to threats or disrespect in any form. For years, she has struggled to be taken seriously—dismissed, variously, as a rich dilettante, a lefty crusader, and a smiley, wide-eyed dingbat. Chronic underestimation, say those close to her, has chafed but has also helped Pelosi fuel her rise with a blend of political cunning, hard work, and raw will. The seventh child and only daughter of a Baltimore machine politician, she was weaned on a vote-counting, constituent-tending, brutally pragmatic brand of politics, the fundamentals of which still guide her. As do early lessons about how to survive as an ambitious woman in a man's world. And, despite her revolutionary, smash-the-china image, Pelosi is a savvy institutionalist who amassed power in part because of her intimate understanding of the House's rules, quirks, and mores.

Now, having smiled, sweated, and strategized her way to the top, the speaker is savoring her burgeoning reputation as a power broker and all-around political badass. While she may not be the person who killed the Bush presidency (that honor goes to the president himself), Pelosi has of late emerged as the chief figure propelling his slide into political oblivion—blocking his bills, stiff-arming his congressional compatriots, and reminding everyone of how lame the duck has become. In much the same fashion, her status as party eminence has been burnished, particularly on the left, by her tie-ups and stare-downs with Team Hillary. Thwarting the will of both an opposition president and the most fearsome political machine in her own party, Pelosi is now being touted as one of the most powerful speakers in modern history. It is a particularly sweet victory for a woman who has spent her political career striving to prove she can hold her own with the big boys.

If there's one thing "Little Nancy" D'Alesandro learned early, it was the importance of math. Born March 26, 1940, she was the youngest child of Thomas "Big Tommy" D'Alesandro Jr., an insurance salesman turned politician who was teaching his tots how to count votes while their peers were still immersed in the exploits of Dick and Jane. A lifelong denizen of Baltimore's Little Italy, Big Tommy was elected to Maryland's House of Delegates at 21, followed by five terms in Congress and three as mayor of Baltimore.

During Nancy's youth, the D'Alesandro household revolved around her father's political life. "He set the tune, and we danced to it," says Thomas D'Alesandro III, Nancy's eldest brother, who also served as Baltimore's mayor. That tune was combative, pragmatic, and personal. The D'Alesandro home operated like a field office, with the children serving as auxiliary staff. Constituents streamed through the door starting at

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10 a.m., and whoever was manning the front desk—a post at which every child served several hours a week starting at age 13—handled requests ranging from finding a family public housing to bailing someone's husband out of jail. It was quite the education, says D'Alesandro, Pelosi's brother. "We dealt with human nature in the raw."

A staunch Catholic and New Deal populist, Big Tommy conferred on his offspring a sense of society's obligation to the poor and powerless, enduring themes in his daughter's politics. But he also schooled them in the nuts and bolts, the transactional nature of the game. His career characterized by hard-fought races and endless vote-scrounging, Big Tommy was forever juggling the demands of the Poles, Germans, Irish, Czechs, Jews, and Italians in his district. Constituent service became his calling card, and Nancy and her brothers helped maintain a "favor file" on everyone for whom their father had ever found a job or served a hot meal. (Nancy's mom kept pots of stew and pasta sauce simmering at all hours to feed petitioners.) The operation also kept scrupulous count of how many votes it had—and needed—from each precinct, block, ethnic group, union, to win an election. "Make sure you have the votes" was drilled into the D'Alesandro children's heads.

Nancy absorbed subtler lessons as well, including how a smart woman could amass power. At the core of Big Tommy's operation was Nancy's formidable mother, Anunciata, one of those women who, born to a different age, would have ruled outright. Smart and ambitious, Anunciata became Baltimore's first female auctioneer in the 1920s. But, when the company wanted to move her to New York, her parents refused. "She was from a very cloistered Italian family who thought working downtown was a sin," recalls D'Alesandro.

So, instead, the fetching Anunciata married a promising young go-getter from right across Albemarle Street, bore him six sons and one daughter, and threw herself into making her husband a success. She and her "moccasin network" of ladies knew everyone in town and what was happening on every block. She figured out the city's bureaucracies and whom to call to get a problem fixed. On Election Day, she patrolled the polling stations. Fiercely tribal, Anunciata served as her husband's chief enforcer and had a long memory for transgressions. "No one could say a word against him," says D'Alesandro. (Family legend holds that Anunciata once slugged a mouthy poll worker.) "With my mother," D'Alesandro told *The Baltimore Sun* in 2006, "there was no forgiving."

Anunciata had big dreams for her only daughter. "Our mother saw in Nancy what she had hoped to do," says D'Alesandro. While Nancy's brothers attended the neighborhood parish school, Nancy was sent to her mother's more prestigious alma mater, the all-girls Institute of Notre Dame. Later, over Big Tommy's objections, Anunciata pushed for Nancy to be the first D'Alesandro to attend college beyond Baltimore, at Trinity College in Washington, D.C.

There, Nancy's political interest solidified. Upon graduating in 1962, she wed beau Paul Pelosi and promptly began interning in the Senate offices of Maryland's Daniel Brewster (alongside future colleague Steny Hoyer). Between 1964 and 1969, she bore five children, but she never gave up the game. Settling in Paul's hometown of San Francisco, the young Mrs. Pelosi distinguished herself as an A-list hostess and fund-raiser. Moreover, as part of a bona fide political dynasty, she possessed connections well beyond the Bay Area's moneyed class. When former California governor Jerry Brown ran for president in 1976, he asked Pelosi to use her family's political juice to help him win the Maryland primary. She promptly volunteered to run Brown's campaign there. Brother Tommy was called on to flip through the favor file from his days as mayor and city council president, leading many of the state's big-name politicos to campaign with Brown. Pelosi has credited that episode with making her a player in the party. A year later, she became the Democratic chairwoman for northern California. By 1981, she was overseeing the entire state.

Pelosi suffered her first hard political blow in 1985, with her failed bid to become chairwoman of the national party. She ran as the moderate—as she did in her first congressional race a year later—arguing that Democrats must "move to the center" and become the "party of capitalism." Organized labor opposed her, and, at one point, a union official dismissed her as "an airhead."

It was a dig Pelosi neither forgot nor forgave and one that echoed broader gender barriers in the race—and throughout her career. A recent biography of Pelosi, *Woman of the House*, recounts her encounters with Democrats who told her during her chairman's race that, on the heels of Walter Mondale's 1984 defeat with Geraldine Ferraro on the ticket, they were loath to elevate another woman to a high-profile party post. "People tell me that I was the best-qualified candidate. But some of them tell me that it's too bad that I'm not a man," she told people privately. As biographer Vincent Bzdek writes, "More than any other single incident, the loss and the reasons for it left her with a moral indignation that drove her up Capitol Hill for years and years after. Her own ambition could now be lashed to the greater, more selfless cause of helping emancipate politics."

Conquering the congressional old boys' network has required all of Pelosi's personal and political skills. When the freshman congresswoman arrived in 1987, "this was essentially a white man's club," says longtime friend Representative George Miller. "And they really weren't going to invite her in." Pelosi set about outplanning, outmaneuvering, and outworking all doubters. To this day, word around the Capitol is that Pelosi doesn't sleep and seems to be everywhere at once: crisscrossing the country on behalf of members, raising money, giving speeches, counting votes, and meeting, meeting, meeting with whoever, as Representative Charlie Rangel puts it, needs "a little love" that day.

Pelosi is a meticulous vote-tracker, has an encyclopedic knowledge of the bills wending their way through committee, and keeps tabs on the political pressures confronting her flock. Her chief of staff, John Lawrence, explains: "She knows what the members need. She knows what the members want. And she knows the difference between the two." Seeking a member's support, the speaker will corner him in the halls and call him at all hours to let him talk until his concerns are conveyed if not resolved. "She has the patience of Job in doing that," says Rangel. She is also a master of the political grace note: remembering birthdays, sending out handwritten thank yous, inquiring after family members. All of this fund-raising, favor-granting, ego-stroking, and information-gathering comes in handy when it comes time to whip votes and forge compromises. By knowing everything about her members, Pelosi is better positioned to control them.

And make no mistake: Control is very important to Pelosi. Among staff, she has a reputation as a micromanaging control freak, with a sharp tongue and zero patience for team members who screw up. To her caucus, meanwhile, Pelosi made immediately clear that she planned to fully exercise the power of her office. Her decision to adhere to the Gingrich-era term-limiting of committee chairmen outraged some of the House's most senior eminences but has enabled her to demand far more obeisance than past Democratic leaders have received. (Caucus unity, she informs me, "is the most elegant message we can send.")

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At times, this has meant launching a direct assault on a member's authority, as when she created a select committee on global warming over the objection of Energy Chairman John Dingell, with whom she has long feuded over fuel-efficiency standards. At others, she simply ignores proposals that don't fit her vision. (Think Ways and Means Chairman Rangel's tax-reform package.) Occasionally, Pelosi's heavy hand raises eyebrows, such as her booting fellow Californian Jane Harman off the Intelligence Committee, despite Harman's qualifications and high profile on the issue. And some complain that (like her mother) Pelosi nurses a grudge-holding tribalism. "She overpersonalizes everything," gripes one House Democratic aide. Her insistence on backing longtime ally John Murtha for majority leader over one-time whip rival Steny Hoyer was seen by many as a leadership failure that inflicted unnecessary bruises. But, overall, party members seem impressed by Pelosi's ability to make tough decisions and "herd the cats." Lauds a senior Senate aide who works closely with her, "The speaker has brass balls."

Of course, being a woman in a testosterone-heavy institution has its drawbacks: As Dick Armey memorably told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2002, "One of the reasons Nancy's abilities are not appreciated is that she is a beautiful woman." But possessing the proverbial "woman's touch" is also part of Pelosi's political arsenal, helping her twist the arms of some of Congress's grumpiest old bulls without putting them on the defensive. (A certain Ways and Means Committee chairman is said to be highly susceptible to her charms.) Some colleagues have described Pelosi's tough-love leadership style as "maternal." Others think it flows more from her upbringing. "She just knows how to schmooze these guys," says the speaker's communication director Brendan Daly, who posits that having "five older brothers helps." Barney Frank offers a more pointed analysis: "Nancy is a very smart woman who used to be a very smart girl at a time when smart girls were told that if they were too smart they would scare away the boys." Now, he adds, no matter how tough Pelosi has to be, in private she has "a manner" that helps soothe ruffled feathers. One leadership aide recalls a meeting in which a disgruntled committee chairman threatened to oppose a bill; Pelosi rose slowly from her seat and delivered a low-key but sternly disappointed lecture on the need for chairmen to set a unifying example. (The chastened member wound up supporting the bill.) Emily's List president Ellen Malcolm has dubbed Pelosi's expression in such situations "The Grandmother Look."

This look—in fact, the whole maternal role—is key to Pelosi's political identity. Pelosi may be tough, even feminist, but not in the in-your-face '70s way that Hillary Clinton is often associated with. She has never downplayed her femininity and is known for her Armani suits, Tahitian pearls, and oh-so-girly chocolate habit.

The pronounced femininity works because it is naturally who she is, but it is also savvy politics: Such self-marketing undermines GOP efforts to paint Pelosi as a left-wing extremist out of touch with mainstream values. The speaker makes frequent reference to her years as a stay-at-home mom, while staffers and colleagues are quick to attribute leadership tricks and personal ticks to her time in the domestic trenches. Following Pelosi's swearing in as speaker, the media was awash in photos of her, gavel in hand, surrounded by her grandkids as well as the children of other members. She looked deceptively like your garden-variety grandma—albeit vastly better coiffed.

Life at the top, of course, is never easy. Her rookie year, Pelosi drew fire from all sides: from the left for being a politics-as-usual sellout, from the right for being a partisan defeatist, and from the entire chattering class for being outplayed by Republicans. Even as colleagues gave her good reviews for holding the caucus together and passing several bills (including ethics reform, a minimum-wage increase, and a bump in student aid), the press and blogosphere deemed her a grave disappointment for letting Republicans kick her around on all the really *meaty* issues like children's health care, stem-cell research, and, most notably, Iraq.

Then came spring, and, thanks to a series of high-profile clashes, Pelosi now finds herself being talked about like a cross between Tip O'Neill and Margaret Thatcher. She continues to hold the line against Republican efforts to grant telecom companies immunity from wiretapping lawsuits. She regularly blocks the minority from amending bills—recently sending Minority Leader John Boehner into a rage on the House floor. ("[T]he majority has an obligation to treat the minority with respect!" he bellowed.) She has postponed consideration of many spending bills altogether until a new president takes office. And, in mid-April, she led her caucus in a vote to derail the president's efforts to force consideration of a free-trade agreement with Colombia. Then she gleefully rubbed Bush's nose in the defeat at a post-vote press conference. Decrying Pelosi's iron grip on the gavel, columnist Robert Novak dubbed her "Czar Nancy." A once-mocking press now marvels at her facility for hardball, even as the liberal blog *Daily Kos* recently cheered, "This is what congressional spine looks like."

But, arguably, the individual most responsible for Pelosi's newly fearsome stature is Hillary Clinton. It was, after all, the letter from angry Hillary donors that overnight cast Pelosi as a defender of the Democratic grassroots. Progressives in particular—many of whom spent much of last year trashing Pelosi's leadership as timid and pathetic—celebrated her refusal to be cowed by arrogant party fat cats. Likewise, reports that pro-Clinton movie mogul Harvey Weinstein had tried to compel Pelosi to back his plan for a revote in Florida and Michigan (charges that Weinstein has denied) raised hackles around the speaker's office and burnished the image of Pelosi as a bulwark against an out-of-control Clinton machine.

Even Pelosi's Colombian tussle with Bush had greater resonance because of Hillary. Public attention to trade has risen dramatically in recent months, as Hillary has pitched herself as the anti-NAFTA choice of blue-collar voters. Colombia specifically snagged the spotlight in early April, when Hillary adviser Mark Penn had to resign as top strategist after revelations that, in his day job as a p.r. executive, he had been working with the Colombian government to advance the trade pact—despite his candidate's opposition to it. As fortune would have it, Hillary helped turn Colombian trade into a hot topic just in time for the speaker to stick it to Bush on the issue.

And so, at long last, Pelosi is getting props from across the political spectrum as a power player. The Iraq war still rages, congressional Republicans still have the numbers to scuttle most Democratic legislation (though Pelosi always has one eye on fattening her governing margin come November), and whether Pelosi is leading her members in a sensible direction depends on your political perspective. But, for now, Madame Speaker has quieted the speculation that she lacks the skill, the smarts, and, most importantly, the *cojones* to lead her caucus.

Looked at one way, Pelosi shouldn't be annoyed with Team Clinton. Rather, she owes Hillary one of her famous thank-you notes—a collegial, even sisterly nod for helping Pelosi answer the annoying but enduring question all women in politics must eventually address: Is She Tough Enough? The answer, quite clearly, is yes. ◆

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Virtually Normal

Is Israel like any other country?

DAVID HAZONY

Jerusalem

In 2006, after the Lebanon war, Israel's foreign ministry decided that the country had a p.r. problem on its hands. The solution? Let the world know that Israel, far from being a place of war and terror, was in fact a land of sunny beaches and beautiful women: in other words, a country that was fundamentally *normal*. And, so, Israel retained the p.r. firm Saatchi and Saatchi, which promised a campaign to help the Jewish state build a "narrative of normalcy." Then, last July, the Israeli consulate in New York arranged for the men's magazine *Maxim* to publish a spread of minimally dressed Israeli women. When feminists and Orthodox Jews protested, the consulate's spokesman explained that his aim was "to promote Israel as a normal country, particularly among the magazine's young male readership."

A normal country? Israel? That idea may sound farfetched to Americans. Yet, as anyone who has ever lived here knows, the desire for normalcy is deeply etched in Israel's national psyche. For 60 years, the Jewish state has struggled to attain a "place among the nations," to quote Benjamin Netanyahu's book by the same name, in which Israelis would live harmoniously with their surroundings the way other, "normal" countries do.

And, in some respects, Israel does seem to be edging toward normalcy. The year 2007 saw a lull in attacks, with only one suicide bombing and fewer Israelis killed than in any year since 2000. Freed from fighting terrorists, Israel's police have turned to ordinary crime, resulting in a 20 percent drop in both homicides and robberies. Tourism is up, as is immigration. The economy remains strong.

The picture, however, is not all rosy. For one thing, normalcy has come with an ugly downside: As terrorism has waned, Israelis have begun focusing on domestic politics—and what they have found is not a pretty sight. The past 18 months saw the resignation of the country's president over rape charges; major criminal investigations against a former finance minister and the head of Israel's tax authority; the imprisonment of Ariel Sharon's eldest son on corruption charges; and crippling strikes by high school teachers and university professors. Most recently, Israelis learned that their scandal-plagued prime minister, Ehud Olmert, was under investigation yet again, this time on suspicion of accepting bribes from a New York businessman.

But not only has this measure of normalcy been deeply disappointing, it has also been far from complete; in many respects, Israel remains the abnormal country it has always been. International bodies condemn Israel's human rights record while ignoring far worse atrocities around the world; anti-Semitism and hatred of Israel continue to occupy much of the global discourse; Iran still appears bent on Israel's destruction.

And so, as the country marks its sixtieth anniversary, one begins to wonder: What, exactly, would it mean for Israel to be a normal country? Is such a thing really desirable? And, even if it is desirable, is it actually possible?

Courtesy Central Zionist Archives

The Jewish people's complicated relationship with normalcy goes all the way back to the Bible. In Genesis, God tells Abraham that his descendents will be a chosen people, and it is already clear that their unique status in the world will carry a steep price: isolation among humanity, beginning with slavery under the pharaohs. When Moses leads his people out of Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai, the Israelites' ambivalence about their uniqueness becomes clear, as they immediately beg him to return them to civilization, to forget the hardships of slavery and bring them back to Egypt. In the biblical narrative, this longing for normalcy is at first

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seen as unequivocally a bad thing.

But, later, when the Israelites demand to be ruled by a king—"that we may be a nation like all other nations"—the biblical rejection of normalcy becomes more tempered. It is soon clear that normalcy has benefits: Samuel anoints Saul as king, setting the stage for the reigns of David and Solomon, a kind of golden age in Jewish history. The chosen people might have something special to give the world—might become, as Isaiah put it, a "light unto nations"—but to do so would require that they live like a nation, addressing the same issues of war and politics that every people must face in order to survive.

This kind of normal life for a self-defined abnormal people was maintained, more or less, for a thousand years, until the dawn of the Common Era, when Judea was a vassal state under the thumb of the Roman Empire. When the Romans tried to force the Jews to abandon their unique practices, the Jews launched an impossible rebellion to preserve their uniqueness. The Romans crushed the revolt, and, ultimately, the Jews were dispersed into exile.

For the next 2,000 years, Jews would be the least normal people on earth. Refusing to assimilate into other cultures, they were expelled from countries across Europe, forever needing to regroup in another host nation. The Jew was always different, never normal. "For the living," wrote early Zionist thinker Leo Pinsker in 1882, "the Jew is a dead man; for the natives, an alien and a vagrant; for property holders, a beggar; for the poor, an exploiter and a millionaire; for patriots, a man without a country; for all classes, a hated rival."

This, of course, was the only possible outcome for a people that insisted on maintaining its uniqueness but possessed none of the normal tools for survival—such as land and power—that other groups had. By the late nineteenth century, however, nationalist movements had given birth to independent states for any number of peoples. It was only a matter of time before the Jews would search for an end to exile, and a return to some measure of normalcy.

Zionism was not the first modern movement that sought normalcy for the Jews. Throughout the nineteenth century, many Jews tried to take advantage of Europe's new liberal spirit. In droves, they shaved their beards, donned modern clothing, and endeavored to participate in the life of their host countries.

The failure of this tack was apparent by the late nineteenth century, as enduring anti-Semitism prevented Jews from enjoying anything like the equality they had hoped for. In 1894, the trial in France of Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus laid bare the inability of gentiles, even in the most enlightened of countries, to accept the Jew as normal. Present at the trial was the journalist and playwright Theodor Herzl, who was so stunned by the failure of assimilation that he began work on *The Jewish State*, in which he argued for a very different solution to the Jewish problem, a different kind of normal. "Let sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe adequate to meet our rightful national requirements," he wrote. "We will attend to the rest."

The Zionist movement that Herzl helped found contained something of a paradox on the question of normalcy. On the one hand, the Jews would be normalized through relocation to their own sovereign homeland. On the other hand, this normalization would enable Jews to fully express their uniqueness—just as they had in the biblical kingdom. "The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness," Herzl wrote. According to this view, the only thing preventing Jews from realizing their potential as a moral and creative force in the world was their severe abnormality in exile. Jean-Jacques Rousseau once wrote that "I shall never believe I have heard the arguments of the Jews until they have a free state, schools, and universities, where they can speak and dispute without risk. Only then will we know what they have to say." One of the most influential Zionist writers, Ahad Ha'am, called on Jews to shed their traditional dependence on texts—their identity as the "people of the book"—and embrace normal human life. Only by doing so, he wrote, could "the Jewish soul be freed from its shackles and regain contact with the broad stream of human life without having to pay for its freedom by the sacrifice of its individuality."

Thus, from its inception, Zionism embodied two conflicting moods: the need for normalcy and the longing for uniqueness. The Jews who went to Palestine sought both. But, perhaps because the dream of normalizing was so grand and the work required so consuming, no one really noticed the inner tension between normalcy and uniqueness, or at least the need to figure out what, exactly, needed to be normal, and what special. For the time being, the most the Jew could hope for was a national life like that of other people.

The Holocaust removed all doubt as to the precariousness of Jewish abnormality. Both Jews and non-Jews saw in the creation of a Jewish state a kind of consolation, but also a belated effort to normalize the Jews. It soon became apparent, however, that the new state would be anything but normal. A nation made up mostly of immigrants; a republic founded by secularists but absorbing hundreds of thousands of religious Jews; a democracy for a people with almost no tradition of democratic self-government; a refuge under physical attack—for decades, one could not be blamed for feeling that the Jewish dream of normalization still had a long way to go.

And yet, given where it started, the Zionist project of normalizing the Jews today seems to have been an astonishing success. Israel is now a modern, developed state, with a strong economy that has, among other achievements, helped to drive forward the Internet revolution. It ranks thirteenth in the world in life expectancy—just below Australia and well above the United States. In sports, the country has become a player despite its size: Israeli soccer standouts compete for top teams in Europe, and Tel Aviv's basketball team has won three European championships in the past seven years. Israel's presence has been felt in the artistic fields as well. The architect for the World Trade Center Memorial, Michael Arad, is Israeli. Supermodel Bar Refaeli made headlines last year thanks to her on-again off-again romance with Leonardo DiCaprio, and an Israeli movie, *Beaufort*, was recently nominated for best foreign film at the Oscars. Compared to the conditions that prevailed when Herzl was writing, who can argue that the Jews have not normalized?

Yet, despite all this, the demon of normalcy still haunts the Israeli conscience. It appears most often in the context of Israel's struggle for security and international legitimacy—especially with regard to the ongoing fight against the Palestinians. In politics in recent years, the call for normalcy has become a touchstone of the left. Yossi Beilin, the head of Israel's far-left Meretz Party and an architect of the Oslo accords, described in a speech in 2002 how he felt during the 1990s, when a chain of diplomatic advances gave many Israelis hope of imminent peace: "The world smiles, we gain entry into clubs where previously the bouncers had stood at the doors and said 'No' to Israel. … We have new friends, as though they had allowed us to touch something else, to savor the taste of a

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normal country, which has familiar neighbors. For the first time." When asked in 2006 to describe his vision for Israel, Ophir Pines-Paz, a contender for the leadership of the Labor Party, said this: "Nowhere does it say that we are supposed to be abnormal. I believe in a Jewish state that is democratic and normal. Now we are going through a rough period, true. But, in the end, we want to arrive at peace. In the end, we want to arrive at normalcy here."

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that "normalcy" is merely a stand-in for peace with the Arabs. The ease with which Israeli leaders unsheathe the dagger of "normal" in political sparring suggests a public fear of the abnormal that crosses political lines and runs much deeper than the conflict with Palestinians. Ehud Barak's claim in 2005 that Ariel Sharon should resign on corruption charges included the assertion that, "in any normal country, Sharon would have no longer been in power." And, when Michael Kleiner, a Knesset member for the right-wing Herut Party, said in 2001 that Arab MK Azmi Bishara had flouted Israeli law in visiting Syria, Kleiner could not help but add that, "in any normal country, they'd put him before a firing squad."

At the same time, there is a conflicting impulse in contemporary Israeli life: the impulse not to be *too* normal. Zionism's complicated relationship to normalcy stems in part from a particularly skewed view of history: a history of looking at the world from within the dark tomb of exile, in which the nations of the world are both alluring and threatening, living a life of agriculture and war, of sovereign power and brutality, of freedom and menace. For the Jew, the cry for normal is a cry for a life denied to him for centuries—a life, however, that he is never fully sure he really wants.

No Israeli, after all, wants to adopt the brutal, Hobbesian rules of normal peoples in history—the willingness to use force indiscriminately, to commit atrocities for the sake of securing their existence. Political movements advocating expelling the Palestinians have not simply failed electorally, but have been banned as racist. Israel has had limitless opportunities to be on the darkest side of "normal," yet, with few exceptions, it has refrained from doing so. "Woe unto us," wrote the Zionist philosopher Eliezer Berkovits in 1943, "if the degeneration of the exile should lead us to a Hebrew nationalism along the European pattern. . . . Not every form of [a Jewish state] is worth the trouble, and many a form could be unworthy of Judaism."

This particular sensitivity, of course, is the button that opponents of Israel inevitably push in their rhetoric against the Jewish state. The occupation, the recourse to violence against its neighbors—these are cited as proof that Israel has failed in preserving the Jews' character as a moral people. The critic George Steiner, for instance, asserts that the Zionist drive to normalize Jews has meant repudiating the entire point of Judaism: "It would, I sense, be somehow scandalous . . . if the millennia of revelation, of summons to suffering, if the agony of Abraham and of Isaac, from Mount Moria to Auschwitz, had as its last consequence the establishment of a nation state, armed to the teeth, a land for the bourse and of the mafiosi, as are all other lands. 'Normalcy' would, for the Jew, be just another mode of disappearance."

Steiner pushes his point even further, invoking the trope of Nazism in attacking Zionism. In his novel *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*, he puts his fiercest attacks against Israel into the mouth of a mythicized Adolf Hitler, who, after hiding in Argentina for decades, has finally been caught by Israeli commandoes and spends time with them pontificating about Herzl's *The Jewish State*: "That strange book. I read it carefully. Straight out of Bismarck. The language, the ideas, the tone of it. A clever book, I agree. Shaping Zionism in the image of the new German nation. But did Herzl create Israel, or did I? . . . Should you not honor me, who has made you into men of war, who has made of the long vacuous daydream of Zion a reality?"

Comparisons to Nazi Germany are, of course, absurd in every respect. Yet such comparisons continue to be made, principally because they *hurt*—not just because Nazism represents the extreme of Jewish victimhood, but because the Israeli wants to see himself as a repudiation of the darkness of mankind. In this context, to be normal—to be as cavalier with human life as nation-states throughout history, not to mention many states in today's Middle East—suddenly becomes a powerful insult.

Perhaps Israel's critics, despite their warped historical analogies, are right about one thing: Maybe normalcy really is overrated. In the wake of the 2006 Lebanon war, the influential Israeli journalist Ari Shavit suggested that Israel's preoccupation with normalcy had gone too far. The country's lackluster military performance, he argued, was the result of years of neglect stemming from the belief that, with the Oslo accords, Israel had finally entered the long-desired stage of normalcy. "We were poisoned with an illusion of normalcy," he wrote.

But the constant hunt for normalcy does more than undermine Israel's ability to defend itself; it may also undermine Israel's ability to be genuinely unique. Natan Sharansky, who survived nine years in the gulag without acceding to his captors' demands that he become a normal Soviet citizen, sees the drive for normalcy as a narcotic, which could make Israel irrelevant to Jewish life: "The more 'normal' our nation is, the less appeal it has to Jews everywhere, both in Israel and in the diaspora; on the other hand, the more exceptional we allow Israel to become, the more powerful the idea of the Jewish state will be, in the eyes of all of our people."

There is also the sheer difficulty of defining what, exactly, normalcy means. Normalcy by the standards of Western nations? Normalcy by the standards of the Middle East? Germany and France once butchered each other with a brutality that makes Israeli roadblocks and the Gaza blockade look like dessert service at the Prime Grill; what makes it possible for them to live in peace today is that *both* nations chose to abandon violence—a decision much of the Arab world has yet to make. To survive in these conditions, Israel has no choice but to continue investing resources in its defense. Perhaps that makes it abnormal by the standards of Western democracies. But the Middle East, as we all should by now have learned, is not always fertile ground for Western conceptions of normalcy.

The final problem with the Israeli quest for normalcy is that it is—well, abnormal. Every country has a national narrative that seeks to explain itself as special in some way. (In the United States, it is the widely shared belief in American Exceptionalism.) Why should Israel insist on being any different?

Given all this, maybe it is time for Israelis to finally accept their country for what it is—extremely normal and perplexingly abnormal, both at the same time. This, after all, is exactly the sort of state that early Zionists had in mind: a homeland for an exiled people who would be allowed to defend themselves, as normal people do, while also showing the world what unique things they had to say, as Rousseau predicted they might. To go on demanding ever-higher degrees of normalcy of themselves will do little to address the problems the country faces, and Israelis might be better off dropping the issue altogether. Maybe then they would feel a little more normal. ◆

David Hazony is a writer living in Jerusalem.

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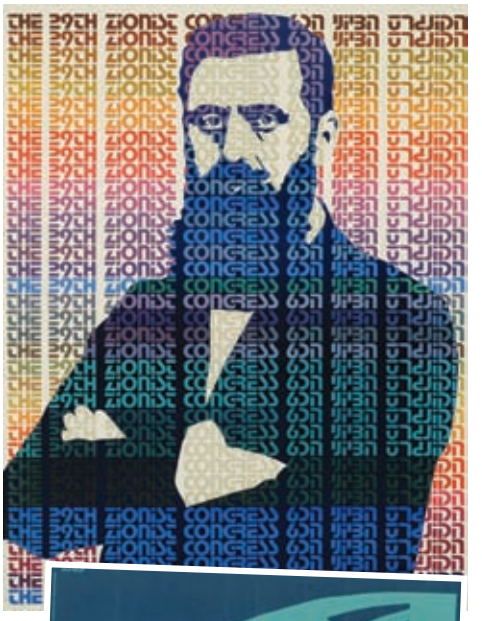

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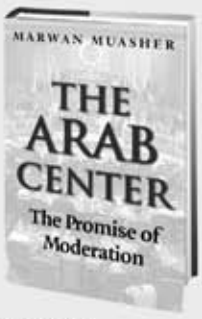

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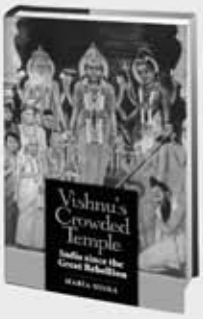

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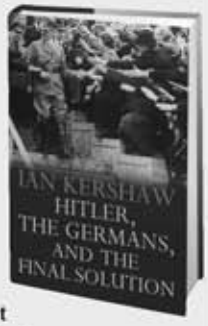

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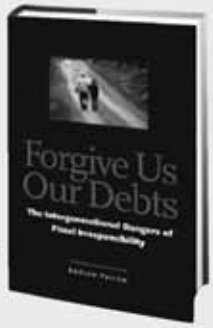

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

WEALTH AND WOES

Rich people are the center of *Savage Grace*. This is not only a fact, it is the mode of the film's being. From first moment to last, the film breathes the attar of *richesse*. The rooms designed by Victor Molero, the costumes by Gabriela Salaverri, the lapping of them by Juanmi Azpiroz's camera—all these confirm that we are leagues above any pleasure-limiting care.

This is not a historical film where extravagance is expected: *Savage Grace* begins in New York in 1946 and continues through a couple of decades. Nor is it like such wealth-weighted films as *The Shooting Party* and *The Remains of the Day*. In those pictures, which are both set in England, money was almost religiously dedicated to the sustaining of class. *Savage Grace* deals with the grandson of a man who made millions in business, and with the grandson's wife and child, all of whom live for easy gratification. Grandpa once said: "One of the uses of money is that it allows us not to live with the consequences of our mistakes." This epigram wilts eventually, but it serves as something like a motto for much of the picture.

The story, we are told, is true. Howard A. Rodman's screenplay is based on a book of the same title by Natalie Robins and Steven M. L. Aronson about Brooks Baekeland, his wife Barbara, and their son Tony. All of them loll in the midst of the fortune that Brooks's grandfather amassed from the invention of Bakelite plastics. The tale begins with Barbara's cosseting her infant son, and it ends with a drastic reversal. (There is much narration throughout, spoken by the latter-day Tony even when he is an infant on screen.)

The Baekelands spend most of their time abroad—Majorca, Paris, and London are three chief settings—and in those places they do little more than please themselves. Large parties undulate past, as do women who attract Brooks; Barbara has her own diversions. As Tony grows, he becomes attracted to both girls and boys, and the story moves toward complications when Barbara sleeps with her teenage son's male lover. Not long after, these three sleep together. Some time later, mother and son have sex of their own, at her instigation and with her expertise.

ANTHONY RUSSO

SAVAGE GRACE
IFC

SANGRE DE MI SANGRE
IFC

THE BATTLE FOR HADITHA
DreamMachine

These and the numerous other sex episodes do not exemplify any brave liberating credo: they are simply immediate responses to impulse. Other subjects occur, including a bit of painting by Barbara, but most of the picture is like a stream that bears those episodes past us. The ending, which is attributed to Tony's mental illness, is not seen as such: it is unpredicted. Given Tony's general behavior all along, that ending is just another kind of instant gratification.

Rodman's dialogue is like good costume jewelry: don't look too closely and it's impressive. The director, Tom Kalin, best known for a picture called *Swoon,* made fifteen years ago, unrolls his film before us like a marvelous fabric, sumptuous and seductive even in the non-sex scenes. What is clear from the first moment is that Kalin intends the film seriously, not scandalously. He is interested in the people who do these things, rather than the actions alone. (More: he lusciously savors the places in which they happen.) And he has cast the principal roles with splendid actors who invest the picture with depth.

The young English actor Eddie Redmayne, as the late teenage Tony (there are, briefly, two younger Tonys), has lagoons of quiet and contempt in him that reflect interesting contradictions. As his father, Stephen Dillane, also English, is resourceful, wryly observant, able to surround himself almost visibly with things that he doesn't say. But the pinnacle is Julianne Moore. Those who have seen her Yelena in Andre Gregory's production of *Uncle Vanya*, as filmed by Louis Malle, know that, whatever role Moore undertook in the course of a varied film career, a marvelous actress was moving through, endowed with electric insight and admirable technique. Her triumph here is in holding our concern for this often foul-mouthed, graceful, but blatant hedonist. This amounts to a triumph over the screenplay: virtually everything she says and does could in itself estrange her from us. It is Moore who convinces not of hidden worth, but of some secret entrapment which she no longer struggles against but enjoys.

But unfortunately for all its assets, especially Moore, *Savage Grace* leaves us somewhat empty-handed. What is it for? It follows the facts of these lives, thus it leaves us even more convinced of the difference between life and art. The facts of this family are life: a film merely about those facts is not art, is not enough. Kalin has said that he saw a tragedy in the story: this may be the motor that got him going, but inevitable disaster is not in itself tragedy. At its gravest, *Savage Grace* is a parable about what happens to some people when they get a lot of

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money and don't know what to do with it except spend it idly. But the film is so excellently made in every way that we expect more from it than their dissolution.

Sangre de mi Sangre (*Blood of My Blood*)—the title is officially double—is a first film, written and directed by Christopher Zalla, who graduated only a few years ago from Columbia University's film school. In every technical aspect, which in film always includes artistic choice, Zalla's film is exceptional. The lighting, the editing, the cinematography are accomplished. *Sangre* joins those other recent American films, early in their makers' careers, that are very competently made. Unlike most of those others, however, we can wish that Columbia had done a little more for Zalla in the art of writing.

The subject is Mexican immigrants in New York, and most of the cast are Mexican. At the start, Pedro, a teenager, is at the Mexican border fleeing people who want to kill him. (We never learn why.) He scales a wall into the United States, is soon apprehended, and is loaded into a truck full of other illegal immigrants that proceeds to New York. (It is not a border patrol truck. We never learn whose truck it is or why it makes this trip. Who paid for it?) During the trip Pedro becomes friendly with Juan, who is about his age, and tells him that he hopes to find his father in New York, whom he has never met. Pedro has a letter from his deceased mother to his father, a locket that she sent, and a hint that the father owns a restaurant and has money. When the truck arrives, Pedro awakes from a long sleep to find out that Juan has stolen his letter and belongings and is gone.

The body of the film consists of two strands. Juan, posing as Pedro, finds the father, Diego, and ingratiates himself. (Diego doesn't own a restaurant. He is a dishwasher who moonlights as, of all things, a maker of artificial flowers.) The real Pedro, bereft of letter and locket, has a series of adventures with a druggie hustler. One can read into this double plot the theme of identity, a search for it, but this is to aggrandize what is only a story gimmick. The false Pedro is more interesting than the real one because of his experiences with Diego: for the real Pedro, Zalla has simply invented some scenes with the hustler to fill out the film's shape.

However, plot flaws and all, we can be glad that the picture was made—like *Savage Grace* at the other end of the economic scale—because of its acting. Pedro and Juan (Jorge Adrian Espindola and Armando Hernandez), both lively and appealing, completely fill their bills. Paola Mendoza, as the waspish hustler, is excellent. She presents a woman who lives in the lowest depths, is defiant about it, and slithers her sharp way moment by moment: an incisive performance. And Jesus Ochoa, the veteran actor who plays Diego, makes us jealous of Mexico. How easily powerful he is, how complex without pretense. In effect, not in looks, he makes us think of Robert Duvall. Even though we have Duvall, we ought to have had more of Ochoa.

Films about the Iraq war continue to come and, I hope, will keep coming. Among the most recent, *The Battle for Haditha* is especially notable. It was made by the British documentarian Nick Broomfield, but it is not a documentary: it is a factual re-enactment. (The current tag is "docudrama.") It recreates an action by U.S. Marines that took place in the town of Haditha. On November 19, 2005, a roadside bomb hit an armored vehicle loaded with Marines and killed an officer. This bombing followed attacks in previous days in which Marines were ambushed, tortured, and killed. Enraged, a squad under a staff sergeant went through some buildings near the road and killed twenty-four civilians, including some children. These killings are at present the subject of military trials.

All the main Marine roles in this reenactment are performed by ex-Marines, though none of them was involved in the real thing. Broomfield, who shot his film in Jordan, lays both sides before us. We see two Iraqi insurgents earlier in the day preparing to do their bombing, supported by members of a terrorist group, whom the insurgents privately think are crazy. We see the Marines at their base earlier in the day, receiving their patrol orders and setting out. We see the explosion, the death of the officer; we see the explosion of anger and the fusillading rampage, justified for the Marines at the moment by the conviction that they are punishing murderers. In fact the local residents were frightened when they saw the bomb being planted. After the explosion we see the two bombers fleeing, one of them returning to his home and hugging his children.

Besides intensifying our reaction to the incident, already graven in us by the first news and subsequent stories, we must wonder about the Marine actors in the film. Several critics have compared this picture to *The Battle of Algiers*, which seems to me off base. The Algerians in that film were commemorating events of which they were proud; can this be true of these Marines? What were these men thinking while they played their roles? Weren't they, simply by appearing in the picture, expressing their view of the matter?

Still, it would be masochistically possessive to regard this film as an instance of typical American brutality. It is only a sample of the whole world that we live in. The killing of civilians by the military is not an American monopoly; Iraq is not the sole venue. The battle is not only in Haditha. Look at tomorrow's newspaper. ◆

In Comacchio

the wind comes from the sea
beyond your eyes,
upsets plates and chairs
messes up your hair
—woman—and I watch
your eyelashes, dark,
in the bright gleaming
that tastes like salt—
you woman of *chiffons* and *voiles*
I saw you on a canvas
of those years,
you were not eating eels
you were reclining under a green umbrella
in a field of poppies

the grass grew to the façades
of a Venice, rural and rustic
it was March
maybe April
first we crossed the bridge
then laid ourselves down
on the soft clover field
in a clearing

I recall the harried fishermen
those around the hull
the big nets, looking at your hands
long and aged,
and I was enjoying the hour
separated
from a late adolescence
that lasts

it was a day
one of the clear days in life

UMBERTO PIERSANTI

Translated from the Italian by M. F. Rusnak

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Dexter Filkins

THE WILD CARD

MUQTADA: MUQTADA AL-SADR, THE SHIA REVIVAL, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ
By Patrick Cockburn
(Scribner, 227 pp., $24)

To feel the power of Muqtada al-Sadr, the young Shiite cleric and tormentor of the Americans in Iraq, all you needed to do, in the years after the invasion, was go to the Mohsin Mosque in eastern Baghdad. There, spread in the street for a half a mile, as many as fifteen thousand young men would stand assembled, prayer mats in hand, waiting for the service to begin. The scene was safe: Mahdi Army gunmen searched the cars and the supplicants for bombs. There were no American soldiers in sight. And then, as the thousands fell to their knees, an imam would exit the mosque, climb onto a raised wooden platform, and signal the beginning of prayer. As he began, the crowd started to chant.

May God speed his appearance!
May God curse his enemies!
May God make his son triumphant!
Muqtada!
Muqtada!
Muqtada!

The "his" in the first three chants referred to the Mahdi—the messiah of Shia Islam—and the last three lines established a momentous equivalence between this redeemer and Muqtada al-Sadr. But Muqtada never showed his face; he almost never does.

Muqtada al-Sadr stands for everything in Iraq that we do not understand. The exiles we imported to run the country following Saddam's fall are suave and well-dressed; Muqtada is glowering and elusive. The exiles parade before the cameras in the Green Zone; Muqtada stays in the streets, in the shadows, surfacing occasionally to give a wild sermon about the return of the hidden twelfth imam. The Americans proclaim Muqtada irrelevant; his face adorns the walls of every teashop in Shiite Iraq. The Americans attack; Muqtada disappears. The Americans offer a deal, and Muqtada responds: only after you leave.

Who is Muqtada al-Sadr? What does he want? And how many divisions does he have? That we know so little so late about someone so central to the fate of Iraq is an indictment of anyone associated with the American endeavor there. But it is also a measure of Iraq itself: of its complexity, its mutability, its true nature as an always-spinning kaleidoscope of alliances, deals, and double-crosses. Muqtada al-Sadr is not merely a mirror of our ignorance, he is also a window onto the unforgiving land where we have seen so many of our fortunes disappear.

Patrick Cockburn has tried to get at the mystery of Muqtada al-Sadr. I think he misses in a few places, but it is hard to imagine anyone, I mean any other Westerner, getting a clearer take on this slippery and moody character. In Muqtada al-Sadr, Cockburn thinks he has found not the crazy-eyed zealot often portrayed in the Western press, but a shrewd and nimble guerrilla prince who gives authentic voice to the downtrodden Shiite multitudes—and sometimes, unfortunately, goes too far. The history of Muqtada's rise that Cockburn recounts here is remarkable, a chronicle of a vast historical current unfolding before a group of bumbling foreign occupiers in a land they do not comprehend. Muqtada did not, as Cockburn rightly remarks, become the leader of Iraq's only authentic populist movement by being an uneducated ruffian. At every turn his enemies have thought him smaller than he is.

Still, the Muqtada al-Sadr whom I came to know in Iraq was a darker figure than the man Cockburn portrays: more malevolent, more reckless. The Mahdi Army did not conquer so much of Baghdad and Basra by its wiles alone. And I cannot so quickly dismiss, as Cockburn appears to do, the stabilizing influences that the American military brings to that wrenching country. By his actions and his manners, Muqtada seems to see himself as a junior version of that other charismatic Shiite leader who so deftly hops between the worlds of politics and violence, Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon. Sheikh Nasrallah, with his unassailable army, his stranglehold on an elected government, his disregard of the frontiers of the state he inhabits—now *there* is a Middle Eastern leader to emulate! For Muqtada, on some days, the future must seem very close indeed.

I saw Muqtada only once, and only for a moment. It was in August 2004, during the siege of Najaf. His militiamen had commandeered the Shrine of Ali, the sacred tomb of the founder of the Shiite faith. American troops, with the blessing of the Iraqi government and the tacit approval of the mainstream Shiite religious leadership, were moving in to take them out. By late August, with the Americans only yards from the shrine itself, Najaf lay in ruins. The Americans were cutting down Mahdi Army fighters by the dozens. I had spent the afternoon at the shrine, then filled with besieged Shiite guerrillas whom Muqtada had been exhorting to "defend" from American "attack." Of course the truth was more complicated. Muqtada's men had seized the shrine some months before, in an attempt to upstage his Shiite rivals; and the Americans, though pulverizing everything around it, were making a great effort not to hit the shrine itself.

That night a deal was struck. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the supreme Shiite leader, had returned from a trip to London ostensibly for medical reasons, though his absence had the predictable effect of allowing the Americans to crush the Mahdi Army. Sistani, by all accounts, disliked Muqtada, but the time had come to save the shrine. At around 10 p.m., a press conference was called at the home of one of the ayatollahs. I arrived late, just as it was starting, and inside the courtyard I could see the Shiite leaders assembled on the front porch. As I stepped toward the house, out of the corner of my eye I saw him. Muqtada al-Sadr, with an aide on each arm, was scuttling out a side door. Then he was gone.

That fleeting glimpse spoke volumes about Muqtada and his relationship with the rest of Iraq's Shiite elders. Muqtada's men had seized the shrine on his orders—indeed, in April 2004 his militiamen had briefly captured provincial capitals across southern Iraq. Najaf had been destroyed. Hundreds of his fighters, mostly illiterate young men from the slums of eastern Baghdad, were dead. And there was the man who started it all, shuffling out a side door. The grown-ups had come to clean up his mess. And yet, for all that, the Shiite elders did not know what to do with him. He was too powerful, too popular. In Muqtada, the lofty clerics saw their own weakness. The deal allowed him

Dexter Filkins covered the war in Iraq for The New York Times from 2003 to 2006. His book, The Forever War, will be published by Knopf in the fall.

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and the bedraggled survivors of his militia to go home.

That has been the story of Muqtada al-Sadr since he emerged in early 2003. He has been underestimated, scoffed at, laughed at. And, once recognized, his enemies have backed away. Paul Bremer, when he was in charge of the American occupation, discounted him, denounced him, vowed to arrest him, then backed off. After the siege of Najaf, the Iraqi cabinet debated killing Muqtada, and even (as one senior Iraqi official told me) drafted his obituary. And then, concluding that he would be more trouble dead than alive, the Iraqi leaders changed their minds. It keeps happening: earlier this year Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki sent his troops into Basra, and Muqtada's men were waiting for them. It is about time, in sum, that people stop underestimating Muqtada al-Sadr and his movement. Yet neither should he be mistaken for something greater than what he really is. It's not for nothing that Muqtada has spent much of the past year cooling his heels in Iran.

Wherever you drive in eastern Baghdad or southern Iraq, you will see enormous posters showing Muqtada and the turbaned, white-bearded faces of two much older men: Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr and Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr. The first is Muqtada's father-in-law, the second is his father. Like a young sovereign uneasy about his fledgling reign, Muqtada uses the banners to remind his followers of his connection to the men whose greatness is not questioned. And that is the crucial thing about Muqtada: his power stems less from who he is than where he comes from. He is, more than anything, a symbol—the face—of a movement that was remaking Iraq long before the Americans arrived.

The Sadrist movement was started by Muqtada's father-in-law, Mohammed Baqir, and brought to fruition by his father, Mohammed Sadiq. The Sadrs espoused a sort of Shia populism—Islamist politics with a grassroots appeal. The movement was born of the political and economic impoverishment of Iraq's Shiite majority, which—under Saddam, the British, and the Ottomans—had been excluded from the centers of power by Iraq's overweening Sunni minority. At the same time, the Sadrs gave vent to the frustration harbored by many Iraqi Shiites for their mainstream religious leaders, who, even after the genocidal furies of Saddam Hussein, rejected the Iranian political model known as *vilayat al-faqih*, under which the clerics reign supreme. Baqir and Sadiq were enormously courageous men, and they succeeded in awakening the political consciousness of Iraq's Shiites. Both of them were executed by Saddam. The great value of Cockburn's book is that it places Muqtada in this historical context, thereby demonstrating that he was not some Johnny-come-lately demagogue who surfaced when the Americans arrived, but the authentic inheritor of an indigenous movement that is transforming Iraq. To read Cockburn's book is to realize why ignoring Muqtada—or even killing him—would probably never work.

When Saddam fell, Muqtada moved rapidly to resuscitate his father's organization. At the time, he might have seemed an implausible candidate for the job. Only twenty-nine, he had had to abandon his studies four years earlier when his father and two brothers were murdered. I should confess here that I was not among those, like Cockburn, who sensed Muqtada's power early on. Cockburn writes that "by the summer of 2003 some ninety percent of the mosques in Sadr City were under Sadrist control." Of course, until April 2003, Sadr City was not known as Sadr City at all—it was called Saddam City. It was only after the regime fell that it was renamed for Muqtada's father. In the Western press, Sadr City is often referred to as a "neighborhood" or an "enclave," but in fact its population includes as much as one-third of Baghdad—more than two million people. That is quite a power base.

Muqtada's ascension was enabled, in part, by the suspicions many Iraqi Shiites harbored regarding the leaders who returned from exile in Iran and London. Principal among those repatriated power-seekers were the brothers Hakim—Mohammed Baqir and Abdul Aziz—of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. SCIRI, as it was known then, was an Iranian-backed Shiite party that deployed a large militia known as the Badr Brigade. The Hakims' zeal for the Shia faith was so overriding that they and their soldiers in the Badr Brigade had fought for the Iranian side in the Iran–Iraq war. The Iraqis did not forget that—nor did they forget that when Saddam unleashed his counterattack on the Shiite south following the first Gulf war, killing at least 150,000 people, the Hakims and the Badr Brigade stayed in Iran. It is no small irony that SCIRI eventually came to enjoy the support not only of Iran but also of the United States; since 2005, the party has been one of the main coalition partners in the Iraqi government. "It was bizarre," Cockburn writes, "that President George W. Bush was to claim repeatedly over the next four years that Muqtada and the [Mahdi] Army were Iranian pawns when SCIRI and Badr, by now allied with the United States, were demonstrably Iranian creations."

It did not take long for Muqtada al-Sadr to reveal his darker side. On April 10, only a day after Saddam's fall, Majid al-Khoei, a pro-American cleric and the son of a grand ayatollah, was stabbed to death by a mob of Muqtada's supporters in Najaf. Muqtada's complicity has never been precisely established. It appears that he allowed Khoei to die on his doorstep. Khoei's death would certainly have been convenient for him: Khoei was a powerful rival and, like Ayatollah al-Sistani, a proponent of the "quietist" school of Shia Islam. As the story goes, Khoei was attacked by a mob of Muqtada supporters after he entered the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf. Stabbed and bleeding, Khoei stumbled to the door of Muqtada's nearby house and pleaded for help. According to Cockburn, who relies on the eyewitness accounts, Muqtada sent a note outside saying, "Don't let them sit by my door." Khoei died shortly after that.

The murder of Khoei was an early turning point in the American occupation. Khoei could have been an important stabilizing influence on Shiite Iraq, and Muqtada's complicity in his murder—and the failure of the Americans to do anything about it—set a precedent for the months to come. Cockburn's assessment of Muqtada's role strikes me as too generous. Raad Juhi, an Iraqi judge who investigated the killing, took sworn testimony from eyewitnesses who declared that they heard Muqtada give the order for Khoei to be killed. On that basis, Juhi issued a warrant for Muqtada's arrest. (The warrant has never been executed.) Cockburn mentions Juhi only once, dismissing him under the "pretense that there was an independent Iraqi judiciary at the time." But anyone who ever met him will vouch for the fact that Juhi was a fearless and independent jurist. Having served as a judge under Saddam, he faced down the deposed dictator at his arraignment in 2004.

The Khoei assassination raises the question: can Muqtada ever be controlled? Or is he at heart just a wild and ambitious thug? The evidence points in both directions. In the summer of 2003, there were lengthy discussions between Muqtada's camp and members of the Iraq Governing Council, the advisory board set up by Bremer. Publicly, Muqtada denounced the American occupation; in private, Iraqi

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officials told me, he would have liked to have been offered a spot. An offer was never made. Had an opportunity been lost? Cockburn does not explore these discussions, but he does suggest, at the end of his book, that Muqtada could have been brought into the fold. "One of the gravest errors in Iraq by the United States was to try to marginalize Muqtada and his movement," he writes. "Had he been part of the political process from the beginning, the chances of creating a peaceful, prosperous Iraq would have been greater."

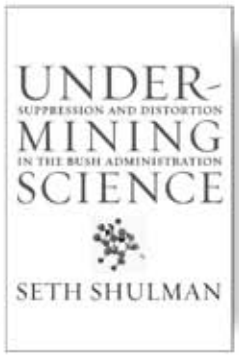
Maybe, but I doubt it. There is no question that Muqtada is a highly intelligent man—more intelligent than he is often portrayed as being—and that his movement contains powerful democratic currents. A number of political parties that looked to him for leadership took part in the parliamentary elections in 2005, and those parties did, for a time, join the Shiite-led coalition government of Nuri al-Maliki. Indeed, it was the Sadrists who engineered al-Maliki's ascension (and the blocking of the American favorite, Adel Abdul Mahdi, of SCIRI).

But I am not persuaded that Muqtada is some sort of robed Jeffersonian. Playing the political system is not the same thing as believing in politics. For all his flirtations with the democratic process, the most salient fact about Muqtada al-Sadr is that he has never been able to bring himself to retire the thousands of gunmen who answer his call. And whatever Muqtada's personal inclinations, the Mahdi Army has been one of the more brutal forces in Iraqi society.

I have my own memories of their brutality. In August 2004, as the battle for the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf was winding down, an Iraqi colleague and I were detained by a group of Mahdi Army militiamen and brought to one of its sharia courts, which had sprung up in the areas under the militia's control. For several exceedingly tense minutes, my colleague and I stood before a Sadrist cleric while the Mahdi Army militiamen who captured us waited for permission to shoot us. The cleric considered the request, asked us some questions—and then told us to get out of town. A few days later, after the fighting was over, my Iraqi colleague returned to one of the sharia courts and found the corpses of more than sixty people who had apparently been executed.

Likewise, the Mahdi Army played a central role in driving the civil war that overtook the country in 2005 and 2006. As Cockburn correctly points out, it was the failure of the Americans and the Iraqi government to stop the Sunni insurgency's murderous attacks on Shiite civilians

Harmful Politics



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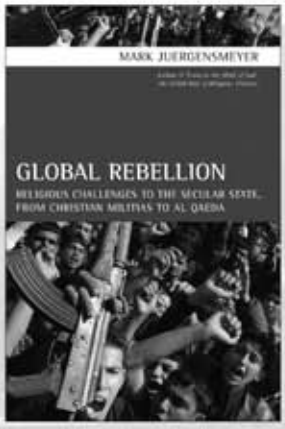

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that drove the population into the arms of Muqtada and the other militias. If the Americans could not protect the Shiite neighborhoods from suicide attacks, the Mahdi Army could.

At the same time, Muqtada's militiamen infiltrated the security services of the Shiite-led government that won the elections in 2005 (though not as extensively as did the Badr Brigade). It was after the triumph of the Shiite coalition that the death squads—official and unofficial—really got going. I am still haunted by the story that a Sunni father told me in Baghdad in late 2005 about how his son had been snatched from the family's home by a group of men identifying themselves as Iraqi police—and then, later, how the father received a ransom demand from men claiming to be members of the Mahdi Army. The family never got their son back. It is fair to say that Muqtada's militia succeeded in securing so many of Baghdad's neighborhoods—and the allegiance of the city's inhabitants—only because they were willing to do the dirty work of getting rid of the Sunnis. All the while, of course, Muqtada was proclaiming publicly that he was not sectarian.

This is a crucial point. All the excesses—the sharia courts, the death squads, the protection money that Mahdi gunmen regularly demand of Shiite merchants—are they perpetrated with Muqtada's approval? There is no question that parts of his movement have slipped from Muqtada's control, but just how much power has drained away is unclear. Cockburn raises the same question and, despite his best efforts, he is unable to answer it conclusively. "Muqtada was always a man riding a tiger, sometimes presiding, sometimes controlling the mass movement he nominally led. His words and actions were often far apart." That is correct.

And then, last summer, something remarkable happened: Muqtada appeared to retreat. In August, following a spate of heavy fighting with the Badr Brigade—the militia of one of the parties in the Iraqi government—Muqtada declared a six-month cease-fire. At around the same time, he appears to have left for Iran—from which, presumably, he has watched the American "surge" of combat forces in Baghdad. And this, finally, raises the most crucial question of all: what is Muqtada doing in Iran?

Muqtada al-Sadr's relationship with the Iranian regime has always been a complicated one, stemming in part from his father, who refused to acknowledge the regime's primacy over Iraq's Shia. (He also did not care much for Iraq's Iranian-born grand ayatollahs, Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei or Ali al-Sistani.) Sadiq was, like his son is now, an Iraqi nationalist. For its part, the Iranian regime has consistently had two objectives in Iraq: to keep the state weak and to bog the Americans down. To this end, the Iranians have provided support for Muqtada, even if the details of that support remain fuzzy. It is almost certainly true that the Iranians have given him money and guns. (My first personal recognition of this came in 2004, as I walked through a makeshift graveyard in Najaf, where I found a handful of graves marked with the names and Tehran addresses of Iranian volunteers killed in the battle.)

And yet the Iranians have not hesitated to rein Muqtada in when his activities have conflicted with their interests. Last summer, after the fighting between the Mahdi Army and the Badr Brigade, it was the Iranians who brokered a peace, a former American official who was in Iraq at the time told me. Muqtada declared a cease-fire, and in October he reached a formal agreement with the head of SCIRI (now known as the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council). The deal was announced in Tehran; and it appears that Muqtada took up residence there around the same time. The assumption, the former American official told me, was that the Iranians did not want Iraq's Shiite factions fighting openly in the streets.

Since then, almost everyone has benefited from Muqtada's Iranian interlude. He has been able to lie low while the Americans pressed their offensive in Baghdad. The Iranians have been able to keep him on a tighter leash. And it has even worked for the Americans: Muqtada's absence, and his cease-fire, have been one of the main factors behind the drop in American casualties.

This is not to say that Muqtada's interests and the Iranian regime's are identical—they are not. In a recent interview with Al-Jazeera, Muqtada declared, with remarkable frankness, that he had met with Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, and told him he did not like what Iran was doing in Iraq. "I told him that we share the same ideology," Muqtada said of Khamenei, "but that politically and militarily, I would not be an extension of Iran, and that there were negative things that Iran was doing in Iraq."

Which does not mean that Khamenei was paying attention. Even as the Iranians restrained Iraq's Shiite parties from fighting one another, they pressed their own offensive inside the country. Iranian-backed militias, some of them nominally tied to the Mahdi Army, have carried on the fight against American forces. The Americans refer to these Iranian-backed militias as "special groups," and said recently that they now account for three-quarters of the attacks that kill or wound American soldiers. When Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said, in April, that "what Iranians are doing is killing American servicemen inside Iraq," he was referring to the "special groups."

This swirl of competing interests revealed itself during the Iraqi government's offensive in Basra in March. The Basra operation began as a limited mission, mainly to secure the port at Umm Qasr, which was under the control of several armed gangs. (Basra is being contested by as many as a half-dozen armed groups, of which the Mahdi Army is only one.) But for reasons that are still unclear, the Mahdi Army reacted fiercely to the operation, and the fighting spread. In the beginning, the Mahdi Army inflicted heavy losses on the Iraqi government's forces. The situation was so bad that Iraqi officials, presumably on instructions from Maliki, traveled to Iran to meet with Muqtada and ask for peace. Muqtada, sure enough, ordered his militia to stand down. Here we can only speculate, but it is a good bet that the Iranians, wanting to keep a lid on intra-Shiite fighting, helped broker a deal.

The fight in Basra may have changed some things for good. Maliki appears to have broken finally with Muqtada. After initial setbacks, the Iraqi army continued to push through Basra and eventually took control of the city. For the first time, Maliki publicly criticized the Iranians for meddling inside Iraq. The Iraqi prime minister recently dispatched a delegation to Tehran equipped with evidence of Iranian interference. There is reason to doubt Maliki's sincerity about confronting Iran, which, after all, could make far more trouble inside his country if it wished; but if Maliki has finally resolved to take on Muqtada al-Sadr and his militia, then we are indeed entering a new chapter in recent Iraqi history.

And what chapter is that? There are two ways to look at the Basra fighting. It is either the beginning of a newly confident Iraqi state, asserting itself against Muqtada's militia, or it is the beginning of something close to a Shiite civil war. Later this year, Iraq is scheduled to hold elections for provincial officials. Whoever wins, it is very likely that the losers will not accept the results. In places such as Basra, that could mean more Shiite-against-Shiite violence. And this time even the Iranians may not be able to stop it. ◆

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Anthony Grafton
YESTERDAYS

A HISTORY OF HISTORIES: EPICS, CHRONICLES, ROMANCES, AND INQUIRIES FROM HERODOTUS AND THUCYDIDES TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
By John Burrow
(Knopf, 553 pp., $35)

History was born in Greece in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. It has flourished ever since then, in diverse but recognizably related forms, and it still exists today, as a form of inquiry into the past, a literary genre, and a set of practices plied and taught in universities. That's our story, in the West, and we're sticking to it. Or at least John Burrow is. After a swift glance toward ancient ways of keeping records, Burrow begins his elegant and erudite book with a rich study of Herodotus and Thucydides, the Greek founders of the genre. Then he bounds forward, passing in review Hellenistic and Roman, early Christian and medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment historians, and ends up in the territory that he has cultivated throughout his career: Europe, and especially Britain, in the last two centuries. The trip passes quickly, Burrow makes a highly accomplished guide, and the reader ends up—rather as the tourist does after a well-organized two weeks in Italy—tired, impressed, and gratified. But is it history? That is the sixty-four-talent question, to which we will eventually return.

Burrow's approach has many virtues. It enables him to start, as Greek historiography itself did, with two great writers, Herodotus and Thucydides, and their works, which he contrasts effectively. Herodotus—a Greek from Asia Minor, whose relatives included non-Greek nobility as well as Greeks—set out in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. to describe the biggest events in the recent Greek past: the failed invasions of Greece by the Persian kings Darius and Xerxes in 490 and 480–479 B.C.E. Thucydides, half a century later, set out to describe a set of events that he considered even bigger: the Peloponnesian War of 431–404 B.C.E., in which Sparta and her allies defeated Athens, not only the greatest city in mainland Greece but also the capital of a great empire.

Both men wrote history as epic—and both, especially Herodotus, learned a great deal from Homer about how to do so with bravura. Homer taught them scale, pace, and the solemnity of simple language, and he offered models for many of the scenes that they needed to depict—especially the ability to see a tragic conflict from the standpoints of both sides. Memories of Homer also hovered around the oracles and prophecies that both men recorded: Herodotus because he believed that a divine economy ruled the world, and Thucydides because belief in oracles played a political role in everything from popular morale to the conduct of leaders.

Yet both men posed newer questions as well, questions that Homer would never have asked. "History," the noun that Herodotus chose as the title for his work, did not refer only, or mostly, to narrative accounts of the past. Rather, it was the term that Ionian Greeks such as Herodotus used for any sort of systematic inquiry, into geography or the rituals of other nations as well as events. In the fifth century, as Arnaldo Momigliano, the greatest modern student of historiography, demonstrated long ago, many Greeks mounted formal inquiries of new kinds. The Sophists—the men who taught the politicians of democratic Athens how to give effective speeches—studied morality and politics as well as oratory, as they set out to construct rules for successful public life. Medical men, especially the followers of Hippocrates, systematically tracked the diseases of individuals and whole populations, as they tried to work out the links between climate and ways of life on the one hand and the prevalence of disease or health on the other. The historians, similarly, hoped to give rational accounts of human action: to explain why the Persians had tried and failed to conquer Greece, and why the Spartans had feared, and defeated, the Athenians. These different forms of inquiry intersected at many points: Thucydides, for example, knew the medical tradition well and used it, and his formal pairs and trios of speeches—which, he claimed, reflected either what his protagonists actually said or what they should have said—amounted to an anthology of good and bad, tough and panicky oratory, which he may even have composed as a kind of textbook.

The two founders worked, to some extent, in similar ways: more like modern journalists than like modern scholars. Herodotus traveled the Mediterranean world in order to learn about all the parties who played a role in his great story—including the Egyptians, to whom he devoted a whole book, as well as the Greeks, the Persians, and the Scythians. Thucydides also traveled widely, especially after he failed to prevent the city of Amphipolis, in Thrace, from surrendering to the Spartans, and the Athenians exiled him. Both men depended heavily on what they could learn from interviews, and saw themselves as prudent, skeptical inquirers, who made clear to their readers when they believed reports and when they did not—though some modern scholars argue that Herodotus deliberately falsified or invented many of his observations. Both men had broad enough sympathies and ideas that they could embrace contradictions—at times Herodotus insists that "custom is king," that different cultures simply do things in different ways, but at other times he expresses horror or amusement about foreign rituals and practices (at times, of course, he also makes fun of his fellow Greeks)—a trait that has left their modern interpreters decades of honest work.

Yet their attitudes and practices as historians finally diverged. Thucydides—arriving on Herodotus's heels rather like the first critic in Mel Brooks's *History of the World, Part I* arrives on those of the first artist—rejected his predecessor's work as merely entertaining. He refused to waste space on the ethnographic digressions about excretion in Egypt and funeral customs in India that made Herodotus's work so varied and so diverting. Instead Thucydides insisted that the true historian must concentrate on military and political matters, and that he could do so seriously only for the last two or three decades before his own time, and for events that he could describe in detail on the basis of personal experience or eyewitness testimony. In addition to summarizing what he saw and heard, Thucydides inserted whole treaties into his book word for word, and thus made clear that he wrote for men of substance, like himself—men who knew, as he did, that human nature would not

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change, and that the crimes and follies of Athenian leaders and generals in the fifth century B.C.E. might not be fun to read about as he described them, but that they would still be illuminating, when studied in proper detail, hundreds of years later.

Herodotus achieved his greatest effects in narrative: for example, in his magnificent set-piece account of the defeat of the Spartans at Thermopylae. He told a great story of heroism, national and individual, spiced with unforgettable vignettes—as when the Persian king mocks the Spartans for preparing for battle by combing their long hair, only to be stunned by their courage and their coordinated tactics—and topped off with suitably heroic deaths. But he also crafted a little marvel of Orientalist ethnography, in which the Persians, subjects of a despot and Easterners to boot, behaved in an irrational and cowardly way, while the free men from Greece showed the impact of their civic upbringing in the way they fought—both a pioneering effort to connect behavior in battle to larger social and cultural forms and a worrying portrait in what would soon become stereotypes.

The austere and self-denying Thucydides also attained extraordinary distinction as a writer, though the effects he brought off were very different. Thucydides, as Burrow shows, surveyed the most dramatic and terrifying events with the level gaze of a divinity—one that pities humanity but feels no need to emote. He used many levels of language—from the dry, precise medical terminology in which he described the plague that struck Athens in the first year of the war (from which he himself suffered) to the cut-and-thrust argument in which he couched a memorable dialogue between unnamed Athenians and citizens of the small island city of Melos. In this terrible exchange, the Athenians make clear that as an empire they recognize only force and wish only to expand their power. They reject the Melians' appeals to justice, morality, and the gods. Thucydides placed this passage—which one ancient reader found so horrifying that he condemned it on the grounds that Greeks could never have spoken in such a way to other Greeks, and which clearly reveals something about the folly that led the Athenians to disaster—at the heart of his book, just before he described how the Athenians destroyed the blameless city, annihilated its male inhabitants, and sold its women and children into slavery. And in other passages as well, above all the one in which he described the disintegration of political language during civil war, Thucydides showed that history could be as powerful a tool of investigation into society, conduct, and values as the philosophy that was taking shape in the same years:

> The sufferings which revolution entailed upon the cities were many and terrible, such as have occurred and always will occur, as long as the nature of mankind remains the same; though in a severer or milder form, and varying in their symptoms, according to the variety of the particular cases. In peace and prosperity, states and individuals have better sentiments, because they do not find themselves suddenly confronted with imperious necessities; but war takes away the easy supply of daily wants, and so proves a rough master, that brings most men's characters to a level with their fortunes. Revolution thus ran its course from city to city, and the places which it arrived at last, from having heard what had been done before, carried to a still greater excess the refinement of their inventions, as manifested in the cunning of their enterprises and the atrocity of their reprisals. Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question, inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defense. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected.

Orwell himself did not offer a sharper diagnosis of the ways in which political passions corrupt language.

Both of them, finally, served as models for styles of history-writing that would remain recognizable over the centuries, even as they evolved. Thucydides stands as the ancestor of what we used to call, in graduate school, "real history": the history of politics and wars, traditionally written by and for men, though a number of female historians now practice this art at the highest level. Herodotus, by contrast, stands as the forefather of the human sciences: the history of rituals and customs, of beliefs and behaviors, that survived as antiquarianism in the pre-modern world and branched out more recently into anthropology and sociology. The great German-language historians of the nineteenth century still emulated these unsurpassable models. Leopold von Ranke and Theodor Mommsen, the great historians of states, modern and ancient, were Thucydideans; whereas Jacob Burckhardt, who reconstructed the cultures of Renaissance Italy and ancient Greece, was an impenitent Herodotean.

Burrow tells stories such as these throughout his book: stories of individuals and the choices that they made about the nature of the past and the most revealing way to study it. In most respects, he tells them very well. A passionate and independent-minded reader, Burrow locates the emotional power and rough-edged political engagement in texts that many other modern readers have dismissed as marmoreal and empty. Livy, who wrote a vast account of the Roman past in the last decades of Augustus's reign, taught generations of schoolboys that history was really philosophy, embodied in examples that made its lessons more palatable and emotionally powerful. He chiseled dozens of the examples in question, such as the stories of Horatius at the bridge and the rape of Lucretia, in what became their decorous, marmoreal form. By the twentieth century, many readers found Livy appalling: an unself-critical celebrator of Rome's rise to imperial status, a propagator of the "old lie" that duty and honor made even death pleasant in a good cause. For Zbigniew Herbert, whose poem on Livy became an anthem for young Polish dissidents in the 1960s, he exemplified the condescension and blindness that typified modern, as well as ancient, empires:

> Only my father and myself after him
> read Livy against Livy
> carefully examining what is underneath
> the fresco
> this is why the theatrical gesture of
> Scevola awoke no echo in us. . .
>
> My father knew well and I also know
> that one day on a remote boundary
> without any signs in heaven
> in Pannonia Sarajevo or Trebizond
> in a city by a cold sea
> or in a valley of Panshir
> a local conflagration will explode
>
> and the empire will fall.

Burrow, too, reads Livy against Livy. But he sees the Roman historian as a serious thinker and writer, deeply worried about the contrast between the heroic times he looked back to and the corruption of his own world, and inspired by

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it to achieve a new sense of historical distance:

> the idea of long-term decline, the product of Livy's combination of patriotism and pessimism, is highly interesting as a conception of history, for it itself is an intrinsically historical one; in it the idea of a perennial human nature is superseded. The past was unlike the present not only in superficial, material terms, but morally and intellectually. They did things differently then, and thought and felt differently. Livy had a conception, though a negative one, of a distinctive culture of modernity, compounded of religious indifference, cosmopolitanism and a febrile love of novelty.

To look at Livy through Burrow's eyes is to understand at last why a much later thinker who knew all about the febrile experience of modernity, Niccolò Machiavelli, chose to offer lectures on Livy in the gardens of his friends the Rucellai, and developed in them his most radical thoughts about history, religion, and republicanism. Machiavelli was hooked, in a way that we have not understood well enough, on the challenge of a historian who really grasped the pastness of the past. More generally, Burrow's genial survey points to important methodological morals and destroys many clichés that remain current, if not in scholarship, then at least in surveys: for example, the notions that the ancients all saw history as cyclical, and that the writers of the Enlightenment had no sense of history, both of which he refutes in brief, cogent pages.

Many spoonfuls of honey make Burrow's medicine go down. A fine writer, lucid and humane, he is also a master of precise, informative paraphrase and deft quotation. He chooses examples with great skill. To characterize the "flashes of social history" that interrupt Livy's largely political narrative, he tells two stories in a tight sequence nicely designed to take the reader's breath away. There is, first, the amusing "case of the witty Vestal Virgin in 420 B.C.E. She was exonerated of a charge of unchastity, but was ordered to amend her over-elegant costume and not to make any more jokes"; and then there is the tale of her colleague who, after being convicted of unchastity, "was buried alive." The Roman past—and the world of Livy, gentleman historian—really are both foreign countries. Burrow's text is salted throughout with sly jokes, as when he characterizes the episcopal history of Gregory of Tours as "Trollope with bloodshed." But his eyes are always open, and he is always showing the reader something fresh—such as the striking way in which Gregory, though he offers the reader graphic, intricately told anecdotes about the Franks, ignores their physical appearance. We come to know his heroes well; but apart from their long hair, we have no idea what they looked like.

What Burrow gives us is, exactly as its title indicates, a history of histories—not a history of historiography, much less one of the larger conditions that made different kinds of historical writing possible. And his decision to write a major work in this distinctive manner will come as something of a surprise to those who—like me—first encountered him in the 1960s, when his *Evolution and Society* introduced many of us to the history of modern social thought. A short, packed book, *Evolution and Society* did not exhibit the graceful style or the vast range of knowledge that Burrow displays here, but it was a powerful piece of work nonetheless. Burrow studied at Cambridge with Duncan Forbes, the author of the innovative book *The Liberal Angelican Idea of History*. As a young research fellow at Christ's College—a forcing-house of

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academic talent, where J.H. Plumb stabled and currycombed a generation of brilliant young scholars—he exchanged ideas with another unusually gifted young man, Quentin Skinner, who was already embarked on what has become a lifetime devoted to rethinking and rewriting the history of political thought.

In order to situate the evolutionary forms of social thought that flourished so widely in nineteenth-century Britain, Burrow plunged into a massive secondary literature, debated eagerly with its authors, and explored realms of thought then little-studied: Scottish speculation about the stages of historical development, German efforts to recreate the *völkisch* origins of the law, French visions of the way society would develop. The result, though not consistently readable, was endlessly thought-provoking, and immediately became a classic in the historiography of anthropology and related fields.

The daring that led Burrow to explore foreign disciplines and thinkers was richly, and rightly, rewarded. And it continued to inspire his later work—notably his study in nineteenth-century historiography, *A Liberal Descent*, in which he brilliantly showed how historical scholarship reflected a sensibility also expressed in many other areas of culture. Here is Burrow on the historians' effort to see the British constitution "as made, as men made the landscape, anonymously":

> We recognize such a sensibility as one we rightly think of as characteristically mid-Victorian, in its feeling for the obscure and provincial, and its fascination with the structures fabricated, coral-like, by countless almost imperceptible creatures.... We find it in diverse examples: in the complex ecological chains of *The Origin of Species* and the awareness of the teeming, hidden yet consequential life of "an entangled bank," in the feeling, in *Middlemarch*, for the subtle movement of old provincial society....

The author of these sentences is a master of the historical cross-cut.

Like *Evolution and Society* and *A Liberal Descent*, *A History of Histories* is a scholar's book, built on very wide reading. Its splendid chapters on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, on Gibbon and Ferguson, Carlyle and Macaulay, reflect Burrow's distinctive mastery of British historiography and its intellectual context. But it is the work of a scholar far more interested in individuals than in the larger intellectual and cultural worlds that shaped them and their work, and far less willing than his early self to explore new territories. The consequences of Burrow's decision to tell tales of great men become more serious as the book proceeds. As he creates his glittering necklace, bead by bead, he often fails to note the original connections.

The historical books of the Old Testament, for example, are not the work of an individual person. So the Bible enters Burrow's account not in the years when it took shape—the same years in which Greek historiography was born—but as part of his account of Christian historiography. And the perspective that Burrow brings to bear seems narrow, especially by contrast with what he writes about the Greeks and Romans. The great student of Carlyle appreciates that history can be prophetic and understands the Old Testament's forms of narrative. But he sees the Jewish tradition as totally isolated. Long ago, Momigliano showed that the prophet Daniel's vision of four great empires dominating history, each worse than its predecessor, drew on Greek ideas about the races of men and their degeneration; and even longer ago, Elias Bickerman traced connections between the ways in which documents are recorded in the late books of the Old Testament and Persian practices. No trace of these arguments appears in Burrow's book. Nor does he take much interest in the ways in which historiography developed outside the West. He barely mentions the rich worlds of Byzantine and Islamic historiography—though both were often brilliant, and both developed ancient ideas and practices in powerful and fascinating ways—or the efforts of Jewish scholars such as Azariah de' Rossi to take account of the accomplishments of western historiography.

A central strand in western historiography, as Momigliano demonstrated, is formed by the history of the church. Church historians—as Burrow notes, looking at Eusebius, who helped to create the genre around 300 A.D.—differed sharply from their secular counterparts. Since they were always engaged in polemics, they cited the sources that supported their views in full. And since they were concerned to trace the history of church doctrines and practices, they devoted much of their attention to matters that would now belong to cultural history. Still, Burrow's account, good as far as it goes, falls radically short. Though he devotes perceptive pages to the Jewish historian Josephus, he does not realize that Eusebius drew his practice of citing documents from Josephus and other Hellenistic writers, some of them Jewish. He devotes an admirable chapter to Bede, the historian of the early British church, but then his interest tails off. He mentions John Foxe, the English martyrologist, in the context of a different kind of scholarship—antiquarianism—and fails to connect his work to the massive Protestant and Catholic investment in rival church histories that followed the Reformation. He does not mention Cesare Baronio's great *Annals* of Christian history, or the penetrating reply by the Calvinist Isaac Casaubon, with its demonstration that Hermes Trismegistus was not an ancient Egyptian sage—even though Simon Ditchfield retold this story more than a decade ago in a splendid and widely read book. And though Burrow finds space for one of Gibbon's mocking comments about a church historian—"The learned M. de Tillemont never dismisses a virtuous emperor without pronouncing his damnation"—he does not mention Gibbon's numerous professions of intellectual debt to "the accurate and indefatigable Tillemont." In this case, and in others, Burrow's selective and essayistic treatment distorts the larger story.

When the book reaches the twentieth century, it largely falls apart. Style—Burrow's main concern—still mattered in modern times, but, as he explains, it was not enough. From the mid–nineteenth century, historians achieved an impact not only as writers, but also as the heads of research schools, which took different shapes and achieved different things in Germany, France, Britain, and the United States. Burrow's treatment of this new world, in which historians found themselves expelled from their gentlemanly libraries of leather-bound books and imprisoned in the iron cage of the seminar and the archive, lacks the depth and the elegance of his earlier discussions. True, he has something to say about the *Annales* school that dominated French historiography—and transformed Anglo-Saxon scholarship—after World War II: he describes the careers and the achievements of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the founders of the journal, and of their successor Fernand Braudel, who created the strange and wonderful laboratories for history and related fields that still flourish on the Boulevard Raspail. Yet he shows little sense for the peculiar grandeur of Braudel's writing, for the way in which, as his hostile critic Bernard Bailyn wrote, "To him, the area of the Mediterranean is charged with drama and slicked with affection."

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Burrow shows no interest at all in Braudel's own experience as a prisoner of war, or in the centralized organization of French intellectual and academic life—though, as J.H. Hexter showed long ago in an essay that brilliantly parodied Braudel's style of inquiry, the atemporal nature of his vision of history cannot be understood except in the light of the former, or the vast range of inquiries that he inspired except in the light of the latter. And Burrow does not make clear—except to readers expert enough to decode allusions—how obsessed later *Annalistes* became with statistics, or how strongly Carlo Ginzburg and Robert Darnton, both originally inspired by the French historians, rebelled against aspects of their work. By sticking to individuals and their ways, Burrow leaves the reader who is not a professional historian in the dark.

At one point, Burrow explains why so few women entered the modern academic historical profession until relatively recent years: "the smell of pipe smoke still clung to it in the 1950s." I don't know if Burrow himself smokes a pipe, but the later sections of this book certainly smell of one—a pipe smoked by someone writing in an easy chair, rather than trundling off to archives or ransacking library shelves in search of texts and contexts. This is a lively, wide-ranging book, a fascinating overview of many of the most influential historians in the lost ages before history itself became a discipline and a profession, and a wonderful reader's guide to some of their works. But the way it misses vital connections between traditions and fizzles out when it reaches modern times suggests that the methods and forms of history have changed radically over time—so radically that a single approach cannot do full justice either to the tradition or to its contemporary forms. For all its rewards, this essay in the *longue durée* lacks the analytical bite and precision that made Burrow's earlier books stand out so vividly in the complex, colorful mosaic of contemporary historiography. ◆

William Deresiewicz
THE ISOLATO

THE SEVERAL LIVES OF JOSEPH CONRAD
By John Stape
(Pantheon, 369 pp., $30)

Among the great English novelists, Conrad most resists our understanding. There is sense in this. His largest theme is mystery, and the heart of all his greatest work is dark. He understood this early. "Marlow was not typical," we read of the surrogate who narrates the first and most celebrated of his major works; "to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze." An empty center, then, surrounded by mist. I have studied Conrad for years, yet I perpetually feel, as I don't with any other writer, that I am only just scratching the surface. Perhaps my mistake, as Conrad's image suggests, is that I still believe that there is a hard or steady surface to scratch.

And what is true of the work, as E.M. Forster was the first to point out, is true of the man who made it. "Behind the smoke screen of his reticence there may be another obscurity," Forster wrote, "preceding from . . . the central chasm of his tremendous genius." Another enveloping mist, another absent center. Conrad, who lived three lives—Pole, mariner, and writer—devoted the third to writing about the second and erasing the first. But he knew himself too well to believe in self-knowledge. "One's own personality," he wrote, "is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown." His own memoirs are anti-confessional: evasively genial, suspiciously neat, not to be trusted. Conrad did not understand himself, and did not pretend to understand himself, and did not expect to be understood.

Where does all this leave the biographer? In a fog, it seems. John Stape's new life follows by a year the re-publication, in revised form, of the leading work in the field, Zdzisław Najder's *Joseph Conrad: A Life*. Najder's study is the more thorough, Stape's the more readable, but both have serious shortcomings, as does the other major biography, Frederick Robert Karl's *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, now almost thirty years old. Karl gets a lot wrong, and also promulgates all manner of Freudian improbabilities. Najder's work, the result of half a century in the archives, is unimpeachable as to facts, but its interpretations are often vitiated by a rather free use of conjecture, a feeble textbook psychologizing, and—with respect to anything touching its subject's land of origin—its author's obvious but apparently unconscious Polish nationalism.

Stape's study is written with wit and bounce, and with the kind of ironic worldliness that would seem to be a prerequisite for a biographer but which years of mole-work in research libraries are not inclined to foster. In a spirit of accessibility, he has kept his story short, but at less than three hundred pages, excluding appendices, it is too short. Stape can tell us, of Conrad's collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, that the latter was supposed to act "as a goad on Conrad to produce, a kind of superior secretary with a stick," but that the first result, *Romance*, turned out to be mostly Ford "topped with a drizzle of Conrad." Somehow he cannot find the space to mention that Ford later drafted a section of *Nostromo*, which many critics consider Conrad's greatest achievement, to buy time during serialization while his friend lay incapacitated with depression. Conrad's brilliant, despairing letters go largely unquoted, as do the many vivid descriptions his contemporaries left of him. Of literary appreciation, the book is similarly devoid: *Heart of Darkness* gets one wan sentence ("An artistic development of singular importance . . . "). The last years of Conrad's life go by in a welter of visits, illnesses, and royalties. The reader will finish Stape's volume wondering what happened and what all the fuss is about. A truly satisfying biography of Conrad has yet to be written, and possibly never will be.

Joseph Conrad was born Teodor Józef Konrad Nałęcz Korzeniowski into loss, self-division, and illusion—the very circumstances that thwart us in his life and work. The partition of his native land had been completed two generations before his birth in 1857, and there may have been no child of his time who was made to feel the condition of dispossession more acutely. His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was a writer, and a dreamer, and a leading member of the "Reds," the most radical faction of the Polish nationalist movement. The poem that he composed on the occasion of his son's christening gives both the tenor of that movement—with its self-pity, its gloom, its spiritual hysteria, and its cult of the nation as martyr—and the weight

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of expectation thrust upon Conrad at birth. Titled "To My Son Born in the Eighty-Fifth Year of the Muscovite Oppression," it reads in part:

> Baby son, tell yourself
> You are without land, without love,
> Without country, without people,
> While *Poland—your Mother* is
> entombed.

This was Conrad's patrimony, and the losses were just beginning.

The Russian yoke had always been the heaviest of the three partitioning empires'. Conrad's family, living in what is now Ukraine, were Polish gentry—*szlachta*—amid Jews and Ruthenian peasants. When Conrad was three, his father moved to Warsaw to help organize the resistance movement that was to culminate in the pointless disaster of the Insurrection of 1863. Within five months, he had been imprisoned; within another eight, the Korzeniowskis had been exiled to the killing climate of the Russian north. Conrad's mother was dead before his eighth birthday, his father before his twelfth. His childhood—he had no siblings—was not only grim, it was also terribly lonely. "Konradek is of course neglected," Apollo writes during his wife's last illness. After her death, "he does not know what a contemporary playmate is."

Whatever Conrad's feelings at the time, his ultimate relationship to his father's commitments was violently ambivalent. *Under Western Eyes*, the last of his great works and the one whose writing broke his spirit, expresses a loathing of Russian autocracy as a kind of vampiric force, but it also expresses a skepticism about revolutionary action as inevitably devolving into fanaticism and bad faith. Indeed, political idealism is put to examination in at least four of his five major novels—remember that Kurtz, too, is an idealist—and is seen in each to be at best naïve and at worst monstrous. The ideological extremism that was the waxing power in European politics during the decades of Conrad's career, and that he anatomized so acutely, had been his intimate acquaintance since childhood.

With his father's death, a new influence came to bear. Tadeusz Bobrowski, a maternal uncle, took charge of Conrad's upbringing. Bobrowski was everything his late brother-in-law was not: moderate, rational, practical. But though he tried to scrub Conrad of his Korzeniowski heritage, he could not prevent his nephew, when he was only sixteen, from indulging in the oldest of youthful fantasies by running away to sea. Of his decision to leave his family for Marseilles and the French merchant service, Conrad would later write that "I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations."

Like many of Conrad's autobiographical statements, this must be taken as a poetic rather than a literal truth. As Stape points out, some three million Poles migrated westward between 1870 and 1914. But "standing jump" would have had a specific meaning in Conrad's imagistic lexicon, evoking the moral crisis he had dramatized in *Lord Jim*. Jim's breach of faith comes about precisely because he jumps overboard rather than standing at his post while serving as first mate on a ship that seems about to sink. A "standing jump" would appear to combine the two choices, the "standing" of fidelity and the "jump" of betrayal. But to what was Conrad faithful in jumping away from the national ties he would repeatedly be accused of having betrayed? To Polish romanticism itself. He forsook his father's dream, but not his propensity for dreaming. Indeed, his awareness of this surely colors the fondness with which Jim, that dreamer, is presented. Marlow narrates that novel, too, and in his care for the younger man we can sense an older Conrad's protective love for the boy he once was.

Joseph Conrad by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

Conrad's sea fiction and memoirs tend to mythologize his time at sea as so many years within a band of brothers devoted to the service of the British flag. The truth was more complicated and less happy. He left the French merchant fleet after a few years, not out of any sense that England was his destiny or her service the most noble, but because the far larger British fleet, in greater need of manpower, was more open to foreigners. Even so, the displacement of sail by steam, with its smaller crews, made work increasingly difficult to find. Conrad slowly rose through the ranks, but he was often forced to settle for jobs below his level of certification. In nineteen years at sea, eight of them as a qualified "master," he captained only one ship.

The young *szlachcic* also bucked against the conditions of service. Time and again he would quit a berth after quarreling with his captain. His education and background would also have cut him off from the scrum of ruffians, drunks, and drifters who made up the typical crew. He is likely to have been no less lonely as a young adult than he had been as a child. On shore, he lived a life of culture and expense. Uncle Tadeusz, delivering a long series of final warnings, ceaselessly admonished his extravagance and just as unfailingly funded it. Conrad's long periods ashore—he was afloat less than eight years altogether—were not always involuntary. Throughout his career, he plotted schemes of trade or investment as an alternative to further service; he gave up his only captaincy after little more than a year. His nearly two decades in the service were a series of false starts, and he seems never to have settled to life at sea. Only in retrospect did it assume shape, meaning, and value, and come to stand in his mind for fellowship and fidelity, duty and craft, labor and courage, honor and nation.

This last would prove especially important. *A Personal Record*, Conrad's memoir of his youth, ends with his first glimpse of the Red Ensign, the flag of the British

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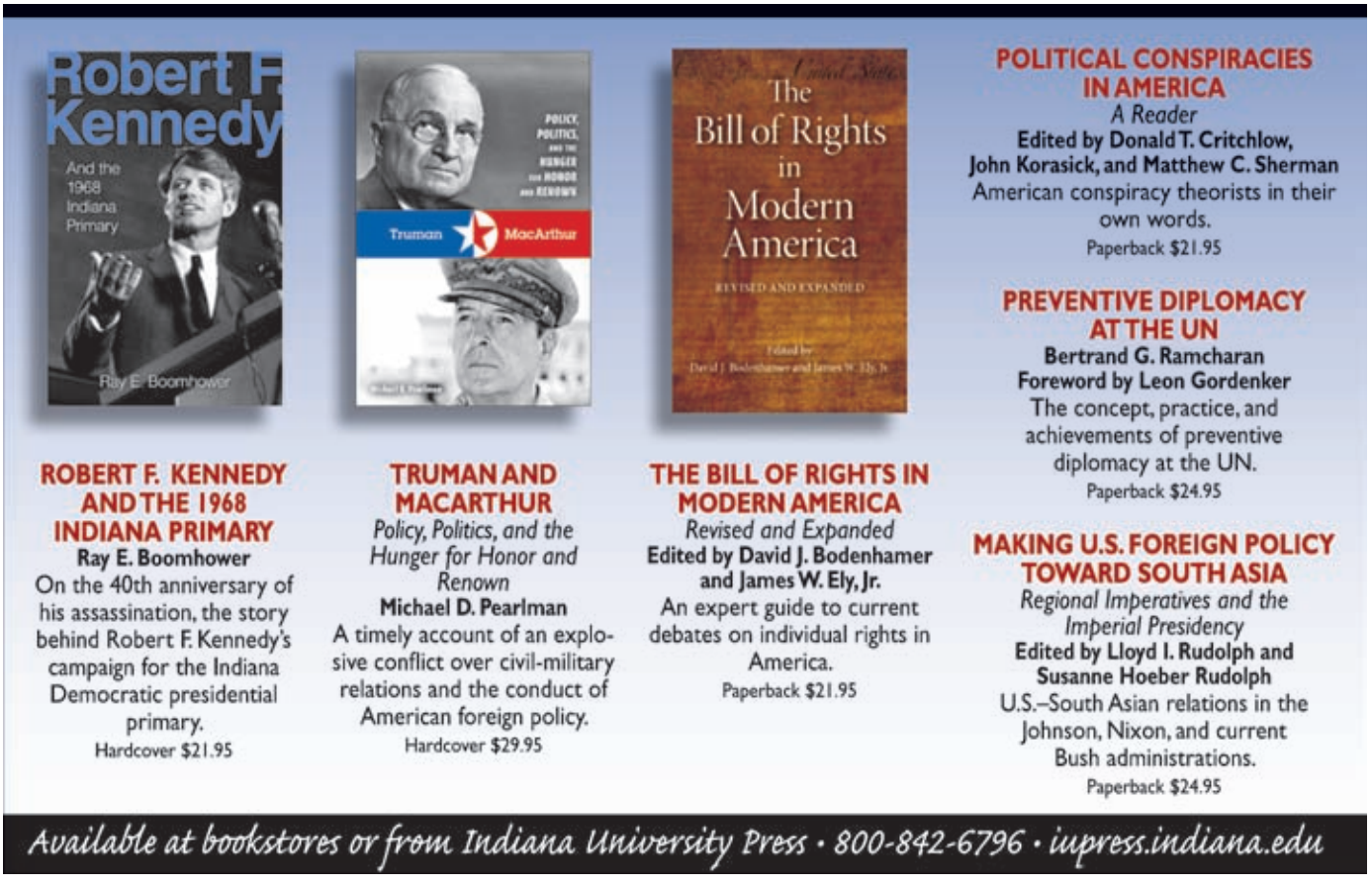
merchant service, "the symbolic, protecting warm bit of bunting flung wide upon the seas, and destined for so many years to be the only roof over my head." His fiction consistently underplays the proportion of foreigners he encountered in the service, which on some voyages ranged as high as 60 percent. In *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* his most personal novel, only four of the sailors are foreign; in the real *Narcissus*, ten were—half the ship. Conrad's retroactive reconstruction of an English service served his active construction of an English identity. But during his years at sea, as he wandered from Poland toward an unforeseeable destination, his identity was protean, and in many ways it always would be.

The spaces that Conrad knew—ships and waters alike—were as multinational as they were British. His crewmates were Russian, Scandinavian, and West Indian as well as Scottish and Cornish; his realms of service were the Dutch East Indies, French Antilles, and Belgian Congo, as well as India and Australia. While his French was impeccable, he spoke English, as he always would, with a thick Polish accent. His letters make use of all three languages and a variety of signatures. In fact, his name seems to have been the least stable thing about him, especially during his years at sea. A company of ghost selves floats across the life—nicknames, pseudonyms, garblings, alter egos: Konrad, Korzeniowski, Konkorzentowski, Korgemourki, Kamudi, Monsieur Georges, T. Conrad, H. Conrad, Johann Conrad, and in one instance, touchingly, Comrad. The list suggests a ship of many hands and many nations. Like Kurtz, all Europe contributed to his making.

Only when he steps ashore does the identity we recognize appear: "J. Conrad," used for the first time to sign off after what would prove to be his final voyage. By then he had undergone his most marvelous transformation of all. Conrad's emergence as a writer has no parallel in English literature, perhaps not in any literature. George Eliot was also thirty-seven years old when she published her first work of fiction, but she was already an accomplished essayist, and she moved in the highest intellectual circles. Nabokov, too, was a foreigner, but he had known English from early childhood, and he had already mastered the art of fiction before taking up the language as a literary instrument. Conrad had both their disadvantages and many others. When he began drafting *Almayer's Folly* one idle autumn, five years and four voyages before it was ultimately finished, he was an unknown seaman who had written almost nothing more ambitious than a letter, and he was venturing into a language that he had not started to learn until he was twenty.

Then as now, there was no shortage of obscurities nursing dreams of literary greatness, dragging their manuscript along from year to year. Conrad just happened to turn out to be a genius. "There is more—and different things too—in me yet," he could still declare at fifty. If he was skeptical about the possibility of self-knowledge, that must have been in part because he had experienced the mysterious depths of his own powers.

Conrad would eventually make art out of large areas of his life at sea, but one experience in particular incited him to fiction. In 1887, during his longest stint in the East, he spent four months sailing in Borneo and Celebes, the remotest parts of the Malay Archipelago. It was his first close look at the East, beyond the bubble of large Europeanized ports such as Bombay, Singapore, and Sydney. His voyages took him sometimes as much as thirty miles upriver, to far-flung trading posts set down amid a bewildering complexity of local cultures and dwarfed by their backdrop of jungle and fog. There Conrad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stumbled upon the sea wrack of colonial civilization: idlers and adventurers, scoundrels and cranks, lost, lonely men who dreamed of Europe and wealth and consoled themselves with native women and the bottle. In them he recognized what was to become his most enduring theme: moral isolation.

Even more than imperial rapacity or spiritual extremism, more than fidelity or toil or unrest, this is the red thread that runs through Conrad's greatest work and makes it a supreme expression of his time, which is still our time. Moral isolation—the sense of being without companionship, without even comprehension, in the perilous business of choice—marks his characters' existence for the same reason that it marked his own. The worlds of Conrad's fiction are shaped by imperialism, but they are not, by and large, imperial spaces. Forster, by contrast, gives us in *A Passage to India* the more typical colonial situation: two communities, European and native, living in precisely defined relations of subjugation and power, the lines of allegiance and conduct carefully laid down. Conrad's attention was drawn instead to the spaces between empires, between nations, the kinds of spaces in which he had passed his nautical career—intercultural spaces, permeated by the force fields of empire but not bound within a single imperial orbit: the Malay world of his early fiction, the Inner Station of Kurtz's domain, the republic of Costaguana in *Nostromo*, the anarchist cell in *The Secret Agent*, the circle of Russian exiles in *Under Western Eyes*. Each is made up of individuals who have lost the orientation of a familiar community and the restraining context of a stable moral framework. (His sea fiction, stories of fellowship and fidelity within a known horizon of expectation, gives the complementary perspective, a picture of the world that has been lost.)

This is not Dickens's London, an earlier and more bounded kind of modern space, domestic rather than imperial, where isolation and incomprehension finally give way to recognition and communion. In Conrad's world of expatriates and isolatoes, mutual estrangement is intractable, cultural fragmentation is irreparable, and neither authorial prestidigitation nor English good fellowship can relieve them. His characters cling instead to shards of broken meaning—a name, an idea, a dream. Each is left alone with his impulses and terrors and illusions, armed only with a fragile sense of right and wrong.

By the time he got to Borneo, Conrad was already several times an exile and many years a wanderer, and what he discovered must have resonated powerfully with his own experience, for he began composing *Almayer's Folly*, set in an up-river trading post and concerned with the type of man he had found there, upon his next return to England. Flaubert and Maupassant, long his reading, were now his models. Timely encouragement came from a Cambridge graduate to whom he showed the growing manuscript while serving aboard a passenger ship. Conrad was a man of culture and a writer's son, and he hungered for contact with the world of letters. His turn to fiction must have felt like a kind of homecoming—perhaps the only one he ever had.

Conrad's first works, shepherded by his editor Edward Garnett, a well-connected member of the literary world, were well received but modestly remunerated. Conrad would vacillate for years about returning to sea, but for the time being he pressed on. Meanwhile, through Garnett and a few other acquaintances, he groped his way into English life, constructing that masquerade of personality that he called "Joseph Conrad." His sense of alienation can be gleaned from "Amy Foster," the brilliant story he would soon write, in which a European castaway on English shores is met with uncomprehending hostility, viewed as a kind of gibbering monster. In person, Conrad could neither hide his accent nor conjure away his foreign looks, but print made for a better place to bury secrets. With a single, slight exception, his fiction would never give the faintest hint of his Polish background. In his first two novels—the name of the second, *An Outcast of the Islands*, suggests its continuity of setting and theme with the first—nothing directly reveals even his nautical one.

"When speaking, writing or thinking in English," Conrad had written as early as 1885, "the word Home always means for me the hospitable shores of Great Britain." The initial qualification is telling, given that Conrad often spoke, wrote, and thought in other languages. Equally telling is the generic nature of his imagined home: Great Britain in general, but not any particular place in it. Conrad had long yearned to find himself a specific English home, and in 1896, immediately after the publication of *An Outcast*—whose title can be read in more than one way—he made a precipitous jump into English domesticity, marrying an under-educated working-class woman he seems scarcely to have known. He was thirty-eight, Jesse George was twenty-three.

The record of Conrad's erotic life, both before and after his marriage, is exceedingly thin. Sexuality seems to have been a less potent force for him than his desire for friendship—this is perhaps another reason we find him so difficult to understand. The Conrads settled in the countryside, near Ford, Stephen Crane, H. G. Wells, and other members of his growing circle. His fiction, too, moves toward comradeship and, haltingly, toward self-revelation. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* finally takes up his nautical experiences directly, but the novel is troubled by Conrad's difficulty in locating himself in relation to the shipboard community whose unself-conscious fellowship it depicts. He seems to have been unable to figure out how he wanted to appear before his English audience. His struggles with identity had become an impediment to his art. The answer that he discovered was not to place himself—not even his "Joseph Conrad" self—as a narrating presence within his fiction. The answer was to invent yet another persona, comfortably nautical and solidly English, with his own circle of friends and listeners. The answer was Marlow.

Marlow unlocked the door to Conrad's major work, helping him produce, in the space of two years, "Youth," the first of his great short stories; *Heart of Darkness*; and *Lord Jim*. The second of these is not his most ambitious work, and arguably not even his greatest, but it will surely be the one by which he is longest remembered. A long string of imitations and counter-versions—by Wells, V. S. Naipaul, António Lobos Antunes, James Dickey, Caryl Phillips, Francis Ford Coppola, and many others—has ratified its canonical, or we might say (adopting a term coined for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, that other river journey) its hyper-canonical status. Like *Robinson Crusoe* or Kafka's "Metamorphosis," *Heart of Darkness* achieves its transcendent stature by approaching the condition of myth. Indeed, like *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land*, though far less laboriously than those other modernist masterworks, it compresses a whole set of myths into a single narrative substance. The voyage of exploration, the heroic quest, the epic descent, the journey into the self: all are implicit in Marlow's odyssey.

But *Heart of Darkness* has itself become a foundational modern myth by registering some of the chief anxieties of its historical moment. The menace that Marlow senses emanating from the jungle is a projection of his own guilt. He knows that he is going somewhere he does not belong, and he senses that the universe will

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intervene to restore the violated balance. The history of literary travel, whether of wandering, discovery, or conquest, holds no precedent for this intimation; in Conrad's consciousness, imperial expansion reached the limit of its own self-revulsion. That is what has made his tale so adaptable to Dickey's Appalachia, Coppola's Vietnam, and every other scene of neocolonial intrusion.

Marlow returns to England a posttraumatic husk, and his confessions parallel Freud's development of the psychoanalytic monologue as a path into the darkness of the human heart. But the imperial system that he had discovered in the Congo resembles nothing so much as a parody of Weberian bureaucracy, another key theoretical articulation of the time. What Marlow finds among the accountants and the managers, with their "methods" and their bookkeeping and their reports, is procedural rationality run mad. The "cannibals" who man his steamboat are paid not in anything they can eat or trade, but in lengths of utterly useless copper wire—but they are paid, Marlow acknowledges, "with a regularity worthy of a large and honorable trading company."

The double reach, toward Freud and Weber, psyche and society, is characteristic of all Conrad's major work, and places him at the pivot point between the great social chronicles of the nineteenth century and the great psychological explorations of high modernism. He achieves the depth of the one without sacrificing the breadth of the other. And the place where the two orientations meet, where Weberian corruption becomes Freudian revelation, is language. Marlow asks the chief accountant how he manages to sport such clean linen in the midst of the jungle. "I've been teaching one of the native women," the accountant explains. "It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work." The last phrase points straight toward Orwell's "Politics and the English Language," toward "collateral damage" and "extraordinary rendition" and "enhanced interrogation techniques." As always, its real purpose is not deception but self-deception, the disabling of the ethical gag-reflex.

Moral isolation is only the first step in the Conradian descent. His characters are strangers to one another, especially to those with whom they are most intimate, but above all they are strangers to themselves. Because they have been stripped of an encircling community, the only ideas that matter to them are the ones they have

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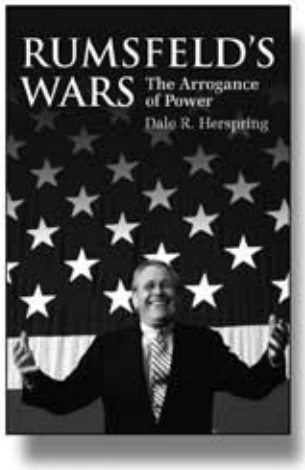

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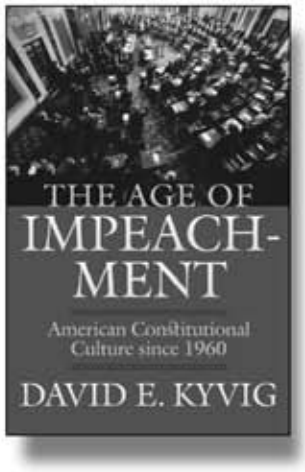

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about themselves, and they can have any ones they want. *Apocalypse Now* is a profound gloss on the novel, but it simplifies Conrad's scheme by making Kurtz too glibly cynical, too comfortable with his own damnation. The original Kurtz, self-divided and self-deluded, hugs his fantasies to the last. That is finally what makes him such a supreme symbol of the modern soul, holed up in his Inner Station, ensconced in the throne room of his imperial self. Moral isolation is exactly what he wants, because it leaves him free to dream the dream of himself undisturbed.

To the decay of language and the gravitational force of self-delusion Conrad opposed the powers of literary art. "The conquest of the earth," Marlow famously says, "is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much." But Conrad's mission—as quixotic a venture as running away to sea, and equally true to his father's spirit—was precisely to "look into it too much." "My task," he wrote in the Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* his declaration of artistic purpose, "is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*." Conrad may be the most visual of novelists, staging his lighting effects with the precision of a master cinematographer: candlelight, lamplight, blinding sunlight; shadow, gloom, and a dozen varieties of haze. An exquisite precision both of visual perception and verbal expression marks his narrative style, a disillusioned irony casting everywhere its cold illumination. "The reaches opened before us and closed behind," Marlow says, "as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return."

Writing like that does not come without sweat and tears; for someone composing in a foreign language, it does not come without blood. Conrad's agonies rival Flaubert's, and his letters are some of the most colorful in the annals of writerly suffering. He is "lonely as a mole, burrowing, burrowing without break or rest"; he is "like a cornered rat, facing fate with a big stick that is sure to descend and crack my skull"; he is alone with a monster "in a chasm with perpendicular sides of black basalt"; he is about to be "ingloriously devoured" by "an irresistible march of black beetles"; he is trapped in "a kind of tomb which is also hell where one must write, write, write." He was writing against time—serialization deadlines, promises to agents and editors—and in the face of illness and money trouble. He suffered constantly from gout and depression. Jesse was no healthier, undergoing an endless series of operations to repair an injured knee whose condition was not improved by her steadily increasing obesity. The couple also had two sons. Flaubert could afford to spend six or eight years on a novel, but Conrad turned out nearly a book a year, including short stories and prose sketches, and still grew deeper in debt. He was no better at handling money than he had been as a bachelor.

Jesse was scorned by more sophisticated women—Virginia Woolf called her a "lump," Lady Ottoline Morrell a "mattress"—but she was plucky and gregarious, and she kept the household together. Yet she couldn't do anything about Conrad's writing schedule, which was always hopelessly disorganized. He was the kind of person who used one project to procrastinate on another. *Heart of Darkness* interrupted the writing of *Lord Jim*, which had itself interrupted the writing of *The Rescue*, a book that finally took Conrad twenty-four years to wrestle to the ground. Almost every one of his novels began life as a short story before expanding beyond all prediction. Of course, another way to see this is that Conrad was willing to let himself be taken by surprise, and was smart enough to trust his intuition and let the deadlines be damned.

There was always more—and different things, too—in him yet. After *Heart of Darkness*, which must have given him an entirely new idea about what he could do, about what there was *to* do, he returned to *Lord Jim*, put Marlow at its center, and amid the pressure of serialization produced a novel that, in its fragmentation of linear sequence and its orchestration of competing narrative modes, represents English fiction's great leap forward into modernist complexity. After *Lord Jim* and a third volume of short stories (there would be six altogether), he felt that he had exhausted his experiences as a subject of fiction. "It seemed somehow," he would later note, "that there was nothing more in the world to write about." And then he remembered a little anecdote about a man who had stolen a boatful of silver, and within two years he had built the republic of Costaguana, and the pseudo-historical epic *Nostromo*, brick by brick.

His imagination, proving even deeper than he had imagined, had undergone a fundamental change. He had come to understand that he no longer needed to rely on his own experience as a source of material—another reason that biography is so helpless before his art. *The Secret Agent*, with its caustic irony and bitter skepticism, and *Under Western Eyes*, with its Dostoevskian tensions, would complete the trio of great political novels. But the three were not just unforeseeably different from his earlier work. Each of them—indeed, each of his five major novels—is radically different from all the others: in subject, in structure, in tone, even in style. It was not enough for him to reinvent himself as a writer after his career at sea. Fidelity to his sense of artistic vocation required him to re-invent himself again every time he sat down to write.

If his peers were in awe, the public was less impressed. Even before *Nostromo*, figures such as Edward Garnett, Edmund Gosse, and George Gissing had come to regard Conrad as the finest novelist of his generation. Henry James was genuinely admiring. But Wells had warned him early that "you don't make the slightest concessions to the reading young woman who makes or mars the fortunes of authors." Conrad proudly ignored the advice. Of "The Secret Sharer," another of his great short works, he would boast that it contained "no damned tricks with girls." But tricks with girls—romantic interest, as scarce in his major work as it is in the record of his life—was exactly what the reading young woman, and most other book buyers, wanted. Conrad's darkness and difficulty repelled them, and he refused to play the game of advertising and publicity.

He had fewer qualms about borrowing money from his agent, James B. Pinker, who, like Garnett, became a kind of father figure, even though both men were considerably younger than he. Finally, after years of patience and mounting subsidies, and just as Conrad had finished dragging himself through *Under Western Eyes*, Pinker put his foot down: no more loans. The ultimatum precipitated a nervous collapse unlike anything even Conrad had ever known. He raved in Polish, held imaginary conversation with his characters, and didn't emerge from prostration for three months.

When he did, he was a broken man. With scant exception, the work Conrad produced over the last fourteen years of his life is frankly second-rate, and even worse. He simply no longer had the moral energy

ANTHONY RUSSO

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left for the terrible daily struggle with words. For the first time in his career, in fact, he was able to write with ease, and he started filling his novels with tricks with girls. And so, in the wryest twist of all, he became a success. He finally wrote badly enough to attract a mass audience. Meanwhile the popular press had caught up with the judgments that more perceptive critics had been advancing for years. By the time he gained fame, as is often the case, his best years were behind him, and his late mediocrities fetched many times the price of, and much louder a volume of praise than, his finest works.

Success made Conrad wealthy, but it never made him easy. He spent money almost as fast as it came in, his failing powers tormented him, his wretched health persisted to the end. His towering achievement would make Joyce envious and Nabokov nervous, but for the aspiring writer, his example braces and terrifies in equal measure. It is never too late to begin, his story tells us, but there is no limit to what you will be asked to surrender. You may reach the Inner Station, but do not expect to make it back. ◆

Emily Wilson
MISSIONS ACCOMPLISHED

THE ROMAN TRIUMPH
By Mary Beard
(Harvard University Press,
434 pp., $29.95)

Everybody over the age of four knows how important it is not to be a "sore loser"—and how difficult. When you lose your whole fortune to your sister at Monopoly, you are not supposed to burst into tears, accuse her of cheating, call her a greedy old moneybags, hit her, tear up the paper dollars, hurl the pieces across the floor, or run screaming from the room. You are supposed to be gracious in defeat: congratulate the winner, allow her to enjoy her victory, stifle your sorrow, and pretend not to mind too much. After all, it was only a game.

It is perhaps unfair that the moral and emotional burden of the situation should fall on the one who has suffered defeat, but the same rules apply beyond the playroom as well, and into the political arena. Howard Dean, we are told, lost the nomination for the Democratic Party in 2004 because he failed to lose well in Iowa: the scream was fatal. Even in war, when winning and losing is a matter of life or death, we still hang on to the unrealistic hope that the losing nation will do the decent thing—that it will accept defeat with good grace, rather than fighting back with terrorism or breaking up into civil war. It is the loser's job to make sure things do not get out of hand.

We regularly assume that it is relatively easy to behave well when you win. After all, winners do not have to grapple with anger, resentment, bitterness, or loss. Americans more often complain about a "victim culture" than about a culture of smugness. But the complicating truth is that winning brings its own social and ethical hazards. Fears about the downward turn of Fortune's wheel, and about the moral costs of social and financial success, haunt many classic American fables about "making it"—*The House of Mirth, Citizen Kane, The Great Gatsby*. There are many contemporary American television shows about winning, from reality TV to the endlessly televised awards ceremonies (the Golden Globes, the Oscars, the Miss America pageant), and they owe some of their fascination to what they reveal about winners: they allow us to watch the difficulties of dealing well with success.

The winners have to demonstrate to the world that they are not ungrateful or arrogant, and they have to avoid rubbing the losers' faces in the dirt. The losers may have been humbled, but humility is expected of the winners. And in more serious contests—such as political elections—it can be just as difficult to win with grace. Voters do not like losers. But they also do not like candidates who make too much of their own advantages, or who stoop to smear campaigns against their rivals. The conspicuous consumption of victory is unappealing. The Clinton campaign learned in New Hampshire that a display of vulnerability is sometimes essential for success.

Military victory raises even more difficult moral and political dilemmas. For one thing, although a single emperor or president may be morally and legally responsible for starting a war, the actual fighting—the winning and the losing—is always done by hundreds or thousands of nameless soldiers. *War and Peace* teaches, among many other things, that battles are fought by the Pierres and not by the Napoleons. Moreover, the losers in war are not merely disappointed; they are wounded, impoverished, enslaved, raped, orphaned, widowed, or just plain dead. And some of the losers may be on the same side as the winners.

Modern commemorations of war—such as Veterans Day in the United States—tend to focus on the sacrifice made by the unknown soldier rather than on the glory of the triumphant general, president, or emperor. It would seem mean and outrageous for an American president to commemorate a war—however gloriously victorious it might have been—with a lavish procession through Washington in a four-horse chariot, clad in purple, with a golden laurel crown, his cheeks and chest smeared with blood, riding high above the defeated barbarian chieftains, who walk before him wearing exotic costumes and weighted down with chains, along with a troop of half-drunk soldiers, carrying the loot they have seized in battle for the benefit of the city. Our wars usually kill millions more people than any Roman general's campaign, but at least we celebrate them with less gusto.

It is tempting to conclude that we are a less bloodthirsty people than the primitive old Romans, who celebrated their victories in precisely this way. But Mary Beard's fine book about the Roman way of winning suggests that even the triumphal parade—that most obvious case of Roman militarism and patriotic pride—was a far more complex cultural phenomenon than most historians have recognized. The triumph, she shows, was a "site for anxiety," a cultural "question," not a straightforward vehicle for celebration. Like modern Americans, the Romans were obsessed with winning, and aware of its pitfalls. Beard declares that her book is "a manifesto of sorts." One of the tenets of her manifesto is that the Romans were no less complicated and conflicted than we are. Her book succeeds as a case study in ancient history, but also as an implicit invitation to reconsider representations of victory and loss in our own culture.

Beard ranges among literary, historiographical, artistic, architectural, numismatic, epigraphical, and archaeological sources with impressive ease and fluency,

Emily Wilson is a professor of classical studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and the author, most recently, of The Death of Socrates: Hero, Villain, Chatterbox, Saint (Harvard University Press).

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showing that the preoccupation with triumph haunts all these different fields of Roman cultural life—from Ovid's cheeky claim that triumphal processions can be good for picking up girls, and his presentation of himself as the victim of Cupid's triumphal chariot, to the many triumphal arches that the triumphalist Romans erected, which Beard reads as attempts to construct a permanent memorial from an essentially fleeting parade.

In ancient Rome, triumphs were the only occasions on which soldiers in full battle gear were allowed to march through the city. The full-scale triumph was relatively rare in most periods. But the triumph was, as Beard convincingly shows, a central element in the Roman political and cultural imagination. Triumphs were the single most important occasion for the Romans to dramatize the connections between foreign policy and domestic power: they showed the defeated barbarians to the civilians back home, and the victorious general, bloody from battle, rode straight from his celebratory parade to his inauguration in domestic government. In the days of the Republic, great generals became consuls. Through triumph, Roman society could declare that war was the foundation on which the city was built. This central Roman idea is expressed in the final lines of Virgil's *Aeneid*, when the hero "founds" his city (*condit*) by "burying" his sword (*condit*) in the body of his enemy.

Over the last hundred years or so, ancient historians have built up a very clear image of what happened at a typical Roman triumph: the route through the city, what the general wore, who marched where, and so on. But Beard brilliantly shows that most of this story about the typical Roman triumph is a scholarly or literary fabrication, supported by very slender evidence, or by none at all; or it is a reconstruction based on evidence from authors in widely different time periods, each of whom has his own axe to grind. The standard claim, for example, that a slave stood behind the general saying, "Look behind you. Remember you are a man," is actually a result of "stitching together" of totally different pieces of evidence, which Beard meticulously picks apart. The demolition work is the most obvious accomplishment of her book.

But Beard's bulldozer also points to a new building project. She suggests that the way to do history in general—and the case of the Roman triumph in particular—is not to tell "a simple story of development and change," but to question and to analyze the "dynamic relationship between ritual practice and 'rituals in ink.'" Tradition, she reminds us, involves a constant process of cultural invention or reinvention. Beard's book provides good evidence for the case that cultural history is not only more interesting, but also more scholarly, than the old models of positivist reconstruction of a unified narrative of the past.

We all think we know that Cleopatra killed herself because she refused to be paraded in a Roman triumph by the victorious Octavian (who was to become Augustus). But Beard reminds us that similar stories of famous prisoners who committed suicide rather than appear defeated before the Roman city recur suspiciously often in the literature of triumph, even before the defeat of Cleopatra, so the trope is unlikely to have originated with her. We should not, then, read these stories as evidence for the (frustratingly unknowable) experience of those defeated by the Roman army. What the stories do illuminate is the complexity of Roman responses to Roman victory. They point to the limits on Roman power—since Cleopatra's asp can help her outwit her enemies, and "call great Caesar ass / Unpolicied." On the other hand, as Beard emphasizes, the stories clearly celebrate "the inexorable power of Roman conquest and triumph": for a Roman prisoner, death is the only alternative to total humiliation.

Beard claims that "it is warrior states that produce the most sophisticated critique of the militaristic values they uphold." But she herself acknowledges that the Romans were not "proto-pacifists," and argues explicitly against the claim—often made by classical scholars and Italian tour guides—that these parades were a way to expiate a sense of war guilt. Beard's evidence suggests that the Romans were not particularly worried about whether war was worth the cost of thousands of Roman lives, or about whether Rome had a right to colonize, or enslave, or impose Roman values on the rest of the world. For the Romans, the big questions raised by the triumph were not "Is war wrong?" or even "Is this particular war worth celebrating?" The questions that vexed the Romans were rather "What are the limits of a single man's power?" and "How rich is too rich?" The triumph, in which a single general or emperor rode high above the city surrounded by wealth gathered from far-flung regions of the world, provided a memorable image of those perennial Roman concerns: the glories and the dangers of wealth, luxury, and tyranny. Beard argues that the general in his chariot always risked being upstaged by the common soldiers, the prisoners, the glorious booty, or the crowd. The elaborate and expensive ritual could go wrong in any number of ways—as when Pompey the Great, returning victorious from Africa, tried to lead a group of elephants through the gates to the Capitol but got stuck. Triumphs were, among other things, exercises in public relations.

Beard's book is particularly good on the ways in which public figures—then as now—try to massage dubious military action into an acceptable public shape; and how easily the meanings of victory and defeat can slip from the control of its organizers. Augustus's extravagant "triple triumph" in 29 B.C.E.—celebrating victory over Dalmatia and Illyricum, Actium, and Egypt—was clearly an attempt to begin his career as princeps of Rome on a high note. But the triumph was also, of course, pretty dubious: triumphs were usually used to celebrate victories over foreign enemies, not victory over fellow Romans in a civil war (as in Octavian's victory over Antony at Actium). It is striking that one of the ancient registers of triumphs, the Fasti Barberiniani, lists only two victories for 29 B.C.E. Beard suggests that the maker or makers of the list tried to "clean up triumphal history" by eliminating Actium from the catalog.

Beard writes that the "ambivalence of the triumph" may help to explain why Augustus himself never triumphed again after 29 B.C.E. He was smart enough to realize that "it was safer to keep triumphal performance on the streets to a minimum, while monumentalizing the ritual in marble, bronze and ink." Some Romans were perfectly well aware of how triumphs could be used for political "spin"—and this in itself, of course, reduced their political usefulness. Another classic example of a disingenuous use of this ritual is the triumph of Germanicus in 17 A.D., under the rule of Tiberius. Germanicus had won various victories in battle over German tribes, but he had by no means conquered the whole of Germany. Tacitus comments dryly on the hypocrisy of this move: "A triumph was decreed to Germanicus, *while the war was still going on*" (the italics and the translation are Beard's).

In January this year, George W. Bush went to Israel for the first time in his entire presidency. The trip seemed designed to perform some of the same political work as a Roman triumph: it enabled the president to return as if victorious from a foreign war, and to suggest that the

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war is over, *while the war was still going on*. Bush announced that he intends to create peace in the Middle East before the end of his term in office. The declaration was, like the Roman triumph, an attempt to inscribe himself as one of the definite winners of history. But Tacitus spells out the dangers of such a strategy in terms that seem somewhat applicable to our current leaders. The spectators, he tells us, were very impressed by the sight of Germanicus on his chariot. But the spectacle also reminded them of some unwelcome memories: "that popularity had not turned out well for [Germanicus's] father, Drusus... and that the enthusiasms of the Roman people were short-lived and ill-omened." ◆

Michael André Bernstein
THE MAN WITHOUT CATEGORIES

THE ASSISTANT
By Robert Walser
Translated by Susan Bernofsky
(New Directions, 301 pp., $16.95)

I.

By now the snapshot of the dead Robert Walser has become one of German literature's most often reprinted and commented-upon photographs, its unstaged, accidental existence only reinforcing the image's iconic charge: the last moments of an almost-forgotten great author in an age of mechanical reproduction. Not surprisingly, descriptions of the photograph all bear a striking resemblance to one another. A single set of footprints, vivid against the deep snow, lead the viewer's gaze to a tall-ish figure lying frozen, fully stretched out, his left arm extended as if he had been making a snow angel, while a few feet further on, his hat, seemingly tossed away rather than merely fallen off, completes the composition's sparse formality. Even the date—Christmas Day, 1956—carries an instant symbolic resonance.

But then Walser's entire life, just as much as his death from a heart attack while taking a solitary walk near the asylum where he had been a patient for more than twenty-three years, has acquired a kind of exemplary significance. It is a characteristic of German high culture—and not always a salutary one—to transform an artist's life into an allegory, and Walser's decades-long hospitalization and literary silence has earned him precisely that fate. Even Elias Canetti, one of Walser's most lucid admirers, could not resist the temptation: "His [Walser's] experience with 'the struggle for existence' takes him into the only sphere where the struggle no longer exists: the madhouse, the monastery of modern times." Romanticized in this way, it is easy to imagine the clinic in Herisau, Switzerland, and the nearby field where Walser's body was discovered joining places such as Portbou, where Walter Benjamin took his own life, as privileged stopping points for bookish tourists eager to visit their heroes' last haunts. Already the Villa Abendstern in Wädenswil, Switzerland, the real-life model for Technical Engineer Carl Tobler's splendid hilltop villa in *The Assistant*, has been purchased and refurbished by the publisher and Walser scholar Bernhard Echtes, and in the summer of 2004 it drew more than five hundred visitors. The fact that Walser himself was deeply antagonistic toward the whole ethos of author-as-hierophant, composing grandiloquent masterpieces with an eye firmly on his place in history, turns out, by the perverse logic of all such mythologizations, only to augment its appeal.

For the last twenty-seven years of his life, Robert Walser was an inmate in two mental hospitals. The first, where he stayed from 1929 until 1933, was in Waldau, near Bern. He had been institutionalized at his sister's urging, following a breakdown during which he suffered from a range of symptoms including auditory hallucinations, severe depression, and suicidal impulses. At the Waldau clinic he seems to have recovered his equilibrium, and within a few months he began writing again. But he showed no interest in being discharged, perhaps in part because as a patient he was guaranteed adequate food and shelter, both of which had grown increasingly uncertain in the outside world. The market for Walser's literary work had never been sufficient to sustain him financially, and by the late 1920s it had dried up almost completely.

Then, in 1933, following a re-organization of the hospital, Walser was transferred against his will from Waldau to the clinic in Herisau, where he spent the remainder of his life. Soon after his arrival there, Walser appears to have stopped writing entirely. Although rumors occasionally surface about new work from the Herisau years, no text of any substance has come to light. In spite of his initial resistance to the move, Walser accommodated himself readily enough to the new clinic, and although the more dangerous of his symptoms had long since abated, he made no attempt to be released. When asked why he no longer wrote, Walser replied, in a line that has become a touchstone of his legend, "I am not here to write, but to be mad."

Much of what we know about Walser at Herisau, including a striking series of photographs, comes from the Swiss critic and writer Carl Seelig, who began to visit him there in July 1936 and continued to do so until Walser's death. Seelig occasionally joined Walser on the long walks that constituted the writer's favorite pastime, and he collected some of their conversations into a book. In 1944, after the death of Walser's brother and sister, Seelig became his legal guardian, and tried, with limited success, to interest the literary world in the writer. He wrote about Walser and helped to arrange the reprinting of some of his work, including a five-volume selected writings, which appeared between 1953 and 1962; but for a long time, except for a few ardent admirers, these books were largely ignored. By the 1970s, however, Walser had acquired a posthumous renown. He was celebrated by an ever-growing chorus of admiring writers, philosophers, critics, film-makers, and composers. It is a trajectory that has only continued to accelerate, and for a good while now serious arguments have been made to include Walser alongside Joyce, Musil, Proust, and Kafka in the pantheon of the most significant modernist literary masters.

Literary re-evaluations on such a scale are rarely free of a certain hectoring defensiveness, and Walser's is no exception. Nothing is gained by hyperbolic pronouncements such as Michael Hofmann's claim that "if one read one 20th-century novel, there is a case to be made for it being *The Assistant*." Well, no, there isn't, and it is no derogation of Walser's remarkable gifts to say so. Walser's admirers tend to characterize him as, in the words of one critic, "the single most underrated writer of the twentieth century," while simultaneously insisting that his brilliance was already

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acknowledged by many of the canonized authors into whose company he ought to be admitted. With nearly formulaic frequency, Musil, Kafka, and Benjamin are invoked as prescient early witnesses to Walser's genius. But a closer look at their actual responses shows a far more tempered estimation.

It is hard to find a serious discussion of Walser that does not mention Musil's review of 1914, in which he directly links Walser and Kafka. In this brief piece, which also discusses works by Max Brod and Arthur Holitscher, Musil famously characterizes Kafka as "a special case of the Walser type," thereby laying down one of the central motifs of subsequent Walser criticism. But Musil had no thought of offering a definitive assessment of the two writers. Indeed, at the time such an idea would have been senseless. In 1914, Kafka was an unknown figure whose first two published books Musil had been asked to review: a collection of short pieces called *Betrachtung* (*Meditation*) and the novella-length fragment *Der Heizer* ("The Stoker"), salvaged from the temporarily abandoned novel project *Der Verschollene*, which was published posthumously, in 1927, as *Amerika*. Walser, on the other hand, was a well-established author with numerous publications, among which were contributions to the major German and Swiss literary journals as well as three novels: *Geschwister Tanner* (*The Tanner Children*), in 1907; *Der Gehülfe* (*The Assistant*), in 1908; and the one for which he is still best known, *Jakob von Gunten*, in 1909.

That Kafka himself took Walser seriously as a writer is clear, though perhaps not to the extent of looking to him as a model or a major source of influence, as is often claimed. In May 1908, Kafka gave Max Brod a copy of *Jakob von Gunten*, and Brod has described Kafka's pleasure in reading aloud to his friends from Walser's humorous short sketches. But in 1909 Kafka writes that though interested, he has still not read any of Walser's other books, and except for one intriguing journal entry of October 1917 in which he associates Walser with Dickens in the "blurring effect of their abstract metaphors," Kafka's diaries and voluminous correspondence make no further mention of Walser at all.

It is not particularly helpful to fortify claims for an unfairly neglected writer with a litany of eminent endorsements. A blurb is a marketing device, not an act of criticism, and too many celebrity quotes are as likely to provoke resistance as they are to arouse curiosity. It is hard to imagine, for example, who could be induced to pick up a book because of admonitory phrases such as Hermann Hesse's much-quoted encomium: "If he [Walser] had a hundred thousand readers, the world would be a better place." It is hard even to know what that means. Walser deserves better. He is a much more interesting writer than one might guess from his legend, and his quirky power as a storyteller, the elusive interplay between the hopelessly—even abjectly—naïve and the sardonically disenchanted, is utterly singular to him.

Robert Walser dead in the snow, Christmas day, 1956

Consider the following passages, the first from Walser's text "Kleist in Thun" (1907, translated by Christopher Middleton), and the second from "Tobald (II)" (1917, translated by Susan Bernofsky):

> Kleist found board and lodging in a villa near Thun.... He writes, of course. From time to time he takes the coach to Berne, meets literary friends, and reads to them whatever he has written. Naturally they praise him to the skies.... He had intended to become a farmer when he came to Switzerland. Nice idea, that. Easy to think up, in Potsdam. Poets anyway think up such things easily enough. Often he sits at the window.... Thun stands at the entrance to the Bernese Oberland and is visited every year by thousands of foreigners. I know the region a little perhaps, because I worked as a clerk in a brewery there. The region is considerably more beautiful than I have been able to describe here, the lake is twice as blue, the sky three times as beautiful. Thun had a trade fair, I cannot say exactly but I think four years ago.
>
> The castle itself was an imposing edifice, and the many beautiful rooms and chambers I was permitted to glance into ... naturally struck my attention and interest with their aristocratic appearance ... the aristocracy dwells in inaccessible, impenetrable castles where it rules, reigns, and resides like a god, or demigod at the very least! ... [The aristocracy's] stables are full of the handsomest and fieriest steeds, its customs are traditional and highly genteel, and as for its libraries, I believe or know them to be just as bursting with deluxe editions as are its rooms and halls with luxury, elegance, and riches.... And the aristocracy's women, how is it they stand out and show themselves to advantage? ... There's not much I can say. Only that duchesses, as a rule, excel in their striking corpulence, and that baronesses are, for the most part, lovely as mild, bewildering moonlit nights. Princesses by birth are perhaps, almost without exception, more inclined to be spindly, frail, and thin that robust and wide. Countesses can be seen to smoke cigarettes and are reputedly haughty. Princes' wives, on the other hand, are gentle and modest.

"Kleist in Thun" shows Walser's mixture of passionate identification and subversive mockery at its most unsettling. He can change tones more swiftly and unexpectedly than any German writer I know, with only Musil, perhaps, as a possible rival. By comparison, Thomas Mann's shifts seem labored and over-prepared, the irony rarely breaking free of its armature of conventional high seriousness. In less than a dozen pages, "Kleist in Thun" blends elements from Walser's own life (he worked as a clerk in a Thun brewery from January until September 1899) with biographical motifs and textual echoes

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from two canonical German writers, Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner. In 1802, Kleist briefly moved to Thun to try to recover from a profound personal and intellectual crisis, and Walser draws freely on Kleist's letters for many of the details in his story. But without any explicit sign that he is doing so, Walser abandons fidelity to Kleist's actual story and reinvents what happened to Kleist through the framework of Georg Büchner's "Lenz" (1839), itself a fictionalized retelling of a still-earlier writer's descent into madness (that of J. M. R. Lenz, in the late eighteenth-century). The effect is of one life-story embedded within or superimposed upon another, of individual identity destabilized through multiple, overlapping narratives.

The stories are linked through the motif of a failed flight into nature to restore the writer's imperiled sanity, and the fusion is all the more disconcerting because Walser makes it impossible to be sure of his own attitude toward his characters. For Walser's generation, Kleist and Büchner were archetypal rebels standing against both classicism and realism, their work a daring exploration of the radical fissure between an unknowable external reality and a shattered inner subjectivity. We know from his own letters that Walser admired both authors, and "Kleist in Thun" is usually read as though its passages of rapt identification with Kleist's mental breakdown were the whole of what the story was doing. But the tale is much less straightforward than that. Repeatedly, the prose suggests a marked distance from and irony toward Kleist's entire project in coming to Thun. ("Nice idea, that. Easy to think up, in Potsdam.") At one moment, the text enacts a seamless fusion of the three perspectives—Walser's, Kleist's, and Büchner's; at the next, the narrator's voice is clearly heard in all its skeptical differentiation.

But nothing prepares the reader for the abrupt move with which the piece ends. Suddenly we see Thun and its most famous inhabitant from the temporal distance and social position of Walser's own situation. We also hear the hyper-charged rhetoric of Kleist's lacerated *Sturm und Drang* consciousness undermined not—as it might in a different writer—by sophisticated ironic distancing, but rather by a kind of vulgar touristic postcard prose that is, in its own determinedly pedestrian way, every bit as eccentric as Kleist's most heated speculations. ("The lake is twice as blue, the sky three times as beautiful.") Finally the story simply trails off into inconsequential, meandering flatness ("Thun had a trade fair, I cannot say exactly but I think four years"), casually dispersing the charged emotions it had so masterfully evoked.

Readers of "Kleist in Thun" have tended to see Walser as ventriloquizing Kleist's and Büchner's voices so intensely that his identity merges into theirs. There is no doubt that many of the descriptions are pitch-perfect in this regard; but Kleist and Büchner risked everything to fashion a language purged of the literary conventions and clichéd formulations of their eras, whereas Walser often makes a point of embracing the most banal, hand-me-down language. The effect is one of radical provocation, but it is much harder to decide in what cause. One might say that Walser undermines both the romantic and the prosaic stances by juxtaposing them, but even this is not adequate as a description of his technique. Strictly speaking, it is not through juxtaposition that Walser undoes both traditions, but rather through what one might call an excess of fidelity to their respective rhetorics. At such moments, it is the hidden idiocy of narrative itself, the vacuity at the heart of all description, that seems to stare out at us from his prose. He passes no judgment because the language of judgment itself comes to seem just one more formulaic—and hence ridiculous—code.

Walser's writing lets in every possible formulation from the most radically experimental to the most routinized with such casual equanimity that it can no longer be called ironic. But however one labels it, his effects are deeply mocking in a way that is not dependent on the sanction of high culture. It is not Kafka's clerks but Flaubert's copyists whom Walser brings to mind. There are times when his descriptions remind one of nothing so much as the rapt idiocy with which Bouvard and Pécuchet labor to make sense of the world by mechanically mastering its multifarious systems.

The most unsettling thing, reading Walser, is the impossibility of being able to tell whether the sudden descents into clichés and platitudes is Flaubertian deadpan mockery or the unselfconscious language of Flaubert's obtuse characters. "Tobald (II)," from which my second passage is taken, lets us see just how strange the effect can be. Superficially, Walser's story, with its forbidding castle and demanding masters, might seem reminiscent of Kafka. But nothing in Kafka prepares us for the narrator's joy in serving his superiors, or for his zeal

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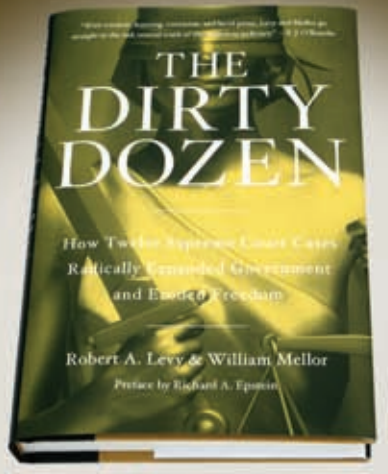

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in chronicling their qualities and traits. Like many of his writings, "Tobald (II)" draws on Walser's own life, in this case the period from October until December 1905, when he worked at Dambrau Castle in Upper Silesia after attending a school in Berlin for domestic servants. It is worth noting that he went into domestic service after having already published his first book (with the prestigious Insel Verlag, which also published Rilke and Hofmannsthal); but there is no trace of a writer's injured vanity in "Tobald (II)," no resentment at his menial position, no explicit anger at the social system in which he must dance attendance on the whims of others in order to eat.

And yet something is amiss in this apparently fascinated account of the narrator's social "betters," something too insistently familiar to be entirely convincing in the string of adjectives and adverbs with which the descriptions are overloaded. There are always a few too many of these adjectives and adverbs not to raise doubts. The servility is undone by the excess of its repeated proclamation. Whole passages seem like a parody of some lost instruction manual for the ideal servant, but it is only their misapplied earnestness and a certain slippage in the choice of words that gives one a reason to question their ostensible intention: "What is it, generally, that the aristocracy prefers to eat? This difficult and delicate question can in my opinion be most happily answered with these words: the aristocracy has a predilection for ham and eggs. It is also glad to devour and dispatch all sorts of tasty jam." Subversion has rarely been this sly.

The seemingly awestruck tone with which "Tobald (II)" talks about the aristocracy has an excess of legibility akin in effect to Warhol's silkscreen prints of soup cans, dollar bills, and celebrities. But imagine, for a moment, an artist like Warhol, an eccentric, socially clumsy figure from the provinces who arrives in New York, but after some minor initial success is *not* taken up by the glamorous and beautiful, or made into a cause célèbre by a new generation of critics eager for heroes of their own. Instead he finds himself unable to earn a living, and he retreats back to Pittsburgh, where he lives on, emotionally troubled and critically ignored. He continues to paint for a few more years, his work there undercutting the cherished assumptions of the art world, but what he produces remains largely unseen and has no lasting resonance in the cultural establishment. His programmatic naïveté, unlike Warhol's, is never interpreted as slyly sophisticated mockery. Something like this happened to Robert Walser. His refusal to adhere to the expectations of German high culture was as thoroughgoing as that of the most radical artists, but unlike many of them Walser also rejected the compensatory sanction of revolutionary ideology. It was this double refusal that deprived him of audience and recognition, and for many decades kept him an idiosyncratic and increasingly unread outsider.

II.

With every year since his death, the literary climate has become more propitious for Walser's canonization. The very factors that did so much to ensure his obscurity are now among the principal causes of his acclaim. The cult of high art that flourished for at least a century, from the 1860s until the 1960s, has abated, and even risks seeming somewhat dated and provincial, its limitations exposed by all that it excluded, overlooked, and scorned. Yet our skepticism barely conceals the fact that the ghost of modernist absolutism still survives as a dream we may mock but toward which we also feel a kind of nostalgic attraction. Hence, I think, the renewed interest in what one might call the deliberately minor-key masterpieces from that era—the fragmentary, unfinished, sometimes naïve or even technically clumsy works that were never taken fully into the canon when they first appeared in print. (Musil is a fascinating example of a writer who can satisfy both interests, since *The Man Without Qualities* is at once monumental and broken, impossibly ambitious and cripplingly aware of the folly of its own ambition.)

Absolute artists such as Mallarmé and Joyce required something like an abject reader whose devotion to the masterpiece is both self-abnegating and all-consuming. Or, as Joyce said, not all that playfully, to Max Eastman, "The demand that I make of my reader is that he should devote his whole life to reading my works." Even allowing for an element of irony, this is a demand that few contemporary readers are likely to meet. Yet there is an alternative tradition that evolved alongside such high modernist absolutism. Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience* is perhaps the most compelling example of a constellation of different texts whose cagey wit, charm, and playful modesty serve as an implicit rebuke to the extravagant claims of the modernist masterpiece. Walser's writings belong firmly in this counter-tradition, and rely for many of their effects on being read against the horizon of expectations raised by deliberately monumentalizing authors such as Thomas Mann. Walser seems to have found preposterous the whole idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total and totalizing work of art in which all the chaotic raw material of quotidian experience would be incorporated, transformed and made whole again.

One way modernist writers announced the seriousness of their ambition was to imply a kind of imaginative apostolic succession in which their own work is seen as the rightful successor of the masterpieces that preceded it, and the early years of this century showed an unprecedented use of classical literature for just this purpose. From Joyce and Pound to Broch and Giraudoux, writers drew centrally on Greco-Roman narratives, both for specific thematic material and, more significantly, to provide a secure, culturally charged scaffolding for their own works. Walser, too, was tempted to offer his own take on mythical heroes, and his brief texts "Hercules," "Odysseus," and "Theseus," from 1920, are among the oddest I know. About Hercules, Walser writes (translated by Middleton):

> His birth was brilliant. If I'm not mistaken he was the outcome of an illicit relationship.... The boy gave early proofs of remarkable strength. Probably he preferred sport and that sort of thing. We know nothing of his schooling. Perhaps he didn't even go to school. It seems to us that he must have assigned more value to physical than intellectual development. His education was rather patchy.

Odysseus, hero of so many high modernist masterpieces, is treated with the same sovereign deadpan tone:

> Odysseus was said to be really shrewd; some people even thought him sly. In any case, he was a capable person. He earned distinction in the war by erecting a wooden horse, about which the enemy made jokes, thereby deriding, sad to say, their misfortune. With this trick Odysseus unquestionably did great service. When Hector fell and Troy went up in flames, the gentlemen could return home; they did so, probably, with broad grins, and that

ANTHONY RUSSO

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was fine because nobody doubts that something thoroughly pleasant always accompanies success. However, the homecoming didn't run as smoothly as they'd supposed.

A typical Walser character tends to describe himself as "a person who deems everything small and modest to be beautiful and pleasing and to whom all that is big and exacting is fearsome and horrid." Yet Walser is actually as "difficult" a writer as any of his more obviously ambitious contemporaries, although for entirely different reasons. With him, the challenge is never a question of arcane references or ambiguous syntax, but rather the impossibility of gauging the work's tone, of being confident about what attitude and point of view the text is taking toward its subject. Sometimes, especially late in his writing career, one can detect a veiled note of aggression toward the (increasingly non-existent) reader, a pre-emptive mockery of all those unaware of how much literary craft has gone into his refusal of the conventional literary tones and gestures. At least that is how I hear the opening of the 1928 sketch "Under a Lime-Tree" (awkwardly translated as "Beneath a Linden" by the usually more reliable Bernofsky):

> The town was beautiful and empty. How concisely put! Can one call this literary writing?
>
> The finer element could be found, in part, on the banks of lakes and seas, in part on mountain peaks. The railroads thrived, and while they did, people wandered through the deserted one, by which I mean a provincial town.... A provincial town can have more metropoliticality about it than a metropolis. What an essayistic sentence!

Walser tried out numerous voices in his fiction, but the one to which he kept returning was that of the *Kommis*, the small-time clerk struggling to maintain a precarious position and to make himself useful to his employers before being thrust back into the desperate mass of impoverished job-seekers. Walser's clerks may belong in the long line of their fictional brethren from Gogol and Dostoevsky to Kafka, but they are unmistakable originals in their attitude toward both their work and themselves. From their connoisseur's delight in the food, tobacco, and drink that is sometimes provided as part of their salary to their anxious self-questioning about their worthiness as employees, everything about them seems slightly off-key and febrile, either too manically intense or too indolently indifferent. They can veer from shameful servility to pugnacious insolence in an instant, with scarcely any motivation in the narrative. But for all their unprovoked outbursts of anger, Walser's clerks are hardly titanic figures. They are too mercurial for that, too easily appeased by a walk in the woods or a good cigar and a glass of wine. Their self-mockery never reaches a Dostoevskian pitch of self-laceration, and whenever it approaches an irreversible explosion it switches tacks entirely. No one but a Walser character could describe himself in these terms as part of a job application:

> Large and difficult tasks I cannot perform, and obligations of a far-ranging sort are too strenuous for my mind. I am not particularly clever, and first and foremost I do not like to strain my intelligence overmuch. I am a dreamer rather than a thinker, a zero rather than a force, dim rather than sharp. Assuredly there exists in your extensive institution, which I imagine to be overflowing with main and subsidiary functions and offices, work of the kind that one can do as in a dream?

A short piece such as "The Job Application" shows just how uncategorizable Walser's seemingly whimsical humor can be. It is impossible to read it without suspecting that the joke is less on Wenzel, the tale's unlikely job seeker, than on the social arrangement in which people are required to sell their services by sending out puffed up résumés and demeaning self-advertisements. In *Rameau's Nephew*, Diderot's great dialogue on the contortions forced on the poor by the need to please their employers, the parasite Jean-François Rameau cries out that "I'm perfectly ready to be abject, but not under duress." By the most unpolemical means imaginable and without any overt signs of resentment, Walser nonetheless makes us see that there is always more than enough duress to make one abject—that the human condition (need, fear, weakness, and mortality) and the human temperament (envy, indolence, and malice) are, in essence, lessons in duress. But what distinguishes both Walser and Rameau from politically minded writers is that their valet's-eye view also has no place for the idealization of one's own kind, no faith that a different class would behave otherwise. Resistance in Walser is always solitary, always a matter of simple refusal and outbursts of rudeness rather than sustained rebellion. It is Bartleby the Scrivener's "I would prefer not to" that Walser's

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heroes evoke more than any of the other clerks in modern writing.

None of the important figures in a Walser tale lasts more than a few months at his job. Walser himself was similarly restless, constantly changing jobs and residences. In Zurich alone, scholars have located at least seventeen different addresses for him. In his fiction, though the setting is often stable, time is a crucially disruptive force. There are relatively few temporal markers even in his longer works, but when they occur they are almost always decisive. Every situation is shot through with transience and instability. The most seemingly solid structures—the castle in "Tobald (II)," the boarding school in *Jakob von Gunten*, or Engineer Karl Tobler's splendid villa overlooking the lake in *The Assistant*—rarely shelter the Walser hero for more than a season. Time puts an end to servility and rebellion, and arrests, sometimes in mid-motion, what Diderot called the pantomime of the needy. With these stories, Walser has reconfigured the nineteenth-century *flâneur* from an idle dandy with aristocratic pretensions into an incompetent clerk and hapless *Kommis*, in principle eager to serve but in practice unable to focus on any work except "the kind that one can do as in a dream." In an epoch overripe with artists uttering their conventionally defiant Non Serviam, the figure of the writer as subversive was never presented with less self-aggrandizement or with such cunning effectiveness.

III.

The Assistant could not have been translated into English at a more suitable moment. Although probably not Walser's best novel, it may well be his most pertinent one for contemporary readers. Assistants are the new aristocrats of the servant class, and in one form or another they have become seemingly ubiquitous. It sometimes seems that everyone is or has been an assistant. Assistant professors, assistant editors, assistant buyers, assistant managers—all are all familiar titles, and parents, too, are often made to serve as mandatory classroom assistants. And if one cannot afford to hire an actual human being, there is always the electronic PDA, or personal digital assistant. From bankable painters and musicians to businessmen and socialites, having at least one full-time assistant is virtually obligatory in order to signal membership among the elite of one's peer group.

To the old adage that no man is a hero to his valet, Hegel is supposed to have answered that this was not because the man was not a hero but because the valet was a valet. Both sentiments, though, ignore the equally prevalent instance of the valet who strongly wants to believe in his master's outstanding abilities, who longs for nothing so much as a brilliantly successful employer whose ventures all culminate in proof of his extraordinary gifts. It is, after all, considerably more gratifying to one's own vanity to be at the beck and call of a genius or hero than of a buffoon. Hence the self-protective, mutually confirming esteem of master and assistant, at least for as long as it can be sustained. Problems begin to arise less from the grudging valet's-eye view than from the collision with an external reality harsh enough to make continued idealization impossible. When the employer is revealed as a self-deluded incompetent, the assistant's position becomes correspondingly unsupportable.

That is no doubt why, last year in the *TLS*, Michael Greenberg described giving a young friend a copy of Walser's novel to help him cope with his job as assistant to a painter about whose work his friend couldn't help feeling ambivalent. It was an inspired choice. In *The Assistant*, it is not an evil employer who brings disaster to everyone in his circle, but a woefully inept one. Although he fancies himself a great inventor and frequently throws himself into his work in bouts of frenetic industriousness, Engineer Karl Tobler is actually another kind of fantasist, a man whose beclouded sense of reality is not all that dissimilar from Wenzel's, the clerk of "The Job Application."

The novel is narrated in the third person, but we experience the ruin of the Tobler household entirely through the eyes of the inventor's newly hired assistant, Joseph Marti (the maiden name of Walser's mother). Long stretches are presented simply as Marti's inner thoughts. At first Marti chastises himself for enjoying his employer's generous provisions of food and drink without dedicating himself sufficiently to Tobler's needs:

> But what is it that I am giving in return for these things? Is it something real, something of substance, that I am able to offer? Am I intelligent, and am I truly offering up the full measure of my intelligence? What services have I provided to Herr Tobler to date? With all due consideration, I am firmly convinced that my lord and master hasn't yet derived much benefit from me. Could I be lacking initiative, enthusiasm, flair?… Tobler's enterprises require the most passionate engagement.… The fate of the Advertising Clock, for example—has it truly taken hold of all the fibers of my being? Am I consumed by it?

There is no indication whatsoever that any of this is ironic, and yet the language is Walser's characteristic mockery by excessive fidelity to the platitudes with which the Employment Referral Office sends its recruits into the world. The technique is reminiscent of "Tobald (II)" with its parody of the faithful servant's attitude. What makes this passage even more problematic, though, is that we quickly deduce that no amount of "passionate engagement" could be of any help. The only possible fate of the Advertising Clock, as of all Tobler's inventions, is a speedy demise the moment the money he inherited and uses to fund his schemes has run out. Unsurprisingly, no investors come forward to finance putting Tobler's contraptions into production, and with every day Tobler sinks further toward the inevitable bankruptcy. Marti's real work consists of writing letters to keep creditors at bay, and sending out futile solicitations for customers and potential patrons. Mostly, he smokes Tobler's cheroots, keeps Frau Tobler and her children company, and daydreams about the tasks he thinks he should be accomplishing.

Tobler's inventions—which include the Advertising Clock, the Marksman's Vending Machine (a particularly bizarre device which, instead of the usual "little slab of chocolate, peppermint or the like,"

Three Possibilities

Like that time when all I wanted
was to hole up in my room. I had allowed myself
to be forgiven, and there I was feeling
this pathetic, incriminating gratefulness.

Or at my favorite professor's dinner party
when I gave birth to what I thought
was a new idea, and the room fell quiet
with tolerance. I still hear that tolerance.

Or that evening I forgave her her betrayal
because it lessened mine, and found myself
for once the forgiver, trying to enjoy that rare
high ground. Poisonous, the air up there.

STEPHEN DUNN

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spits out "a pack of live ammunition"), the Invalid Chair, and the Deep-Hole Drilling Machine—all belong in a comic film about mad but harmless scientists. But here their effects are anything but comic. Along with Marti, we witness the rapidly accelerating decline of the Tobler family from the height of prosperity at the book's opening to debt-ridden penury at its close. In the novel, the ultimate ruin, though imminent, is never directly narrated, since it will occur shortly after Marti quits his job (which is by now unpaid) and begins his wandering again.

In real life, Carl Dubler, the inventor for whom Walser worked in 1903, suffered an even grimmer fate than Tobler. Bernhard Echte, the purchaser of Dubler's villa, tells how four weeks after Walser left his employ Dubler was declared bankrupt, his house was sold off, the couple divorced, and the children were taken in by an orphanage. By deliberately confining itself to Marti's perspective, Walser's novel avoids the drama of a final reckoning, and instead ends on an oddly idyllic moment, in which Marti and Wirsich, his predecessor as Tobler's assistant who had been fired for congenital drunkenness, head out together into a miraculously peaceful landscape and unspecified future. Nothing was learned in this apprenticeship except that good intentions, vaunting ambitions, or idle dreams stand an equal chance of coming to ruin. The industriousness, the instrumental reasoning, and the bourgeois self-reliance so highly valued by Walser's countrymen seem not so much mocked as emptied of all meaning. And since those same values also underlie both the logic and ethos of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel form that traces the education and moral growth of its protagonist, it too is implicitly dismissed, its perspective shown as unworthy of being taken seriously.

Still, any straightforward description of its plot risks making the novel sound far more unified than it is. In the afterword to her fine translation, Susan Bernofsky mentions Walser's claim to have written the book in six weeks as an entry for a competition sponsored by the Scherl publishing house. Since the manuscript was accompanied by a letter demanding an 8,000-mark advance, it was immediately rejected, although Bruno Cassirer, who had published earlier work by Walser, accepted it shortly thereafter. The resulting text is radically uneven and digressive, and contains whole episodes inserted without any concern for either tonal or narrative coherence. The wrenching scenes of mistreatment to which Tobler's daughter Silvi is subjected by the maid, with the tacit consent and sometimes even participation of the child's mother, who is otherwise portrayed with a great deal of sympathy and understanding, seem to have been inserted from a different book altogether. There are sudden inexplicable direct addresses by the third-person narrator to one of the characters or to the reader over the heads of all the characters, as well as frequent abrupt changes of vocabulary and tone by both the narrator and the characters. The language moves inexplicably from traditional literary High German to locutions in Schwitzerdeutsch that are incomprehensible to German readers. Even the title is clearly marked as Swiss, since the German word for an assistant is *Gehilfe*. A native German speaker would need a moment or two for the mental transposition required to make sense of *Der Gehülfe* as anything other than a misprint. Yet the currency used throughout the novel is, as Bernofsky also notes, the German mark rather than the Swiss franc.

I am not at all certain, though, that the issue is merely one of haste in the writing. Had Walser worked on the manuscript longer, it is unlikely that he would have bothered to integrate the disparate elements. Traditional novelistic coherence was never something that he prized. Instead *The Assistant* seems to be reaching toward a form that one might call, paradoxically, the stationary picaresque, framed at either end by the arrival and the departure of its protagonist, whose sensibility provides the link connecting a set of disparate scenes. We are ready to follow the character's experiences and observations in part because of the textual heterogeneity and rapid tonal swings that make the figure as inexplicable to us as he is to himself.

It is hard, though, to reshape the novel form on the run. In the end, for all its inspired passages, the book's frequently unmotivated shifts in style and lexical register, inconsistencies in narrative structure, and meandering digressions risk wearying the reader, not least because it is maddeningly difficult to separate the moments of form-mocking innovation from the suspicion of technical indifference and clumsiness. Walser himself seems to have worried that the novel never really suited him as well as more compact forms such as the short narrative and impressionistic sketch. In those smaller genres, he could set loose a faux naiveté that teases the reader with the suspicion that the writing might really be as clunky and maladroit as it sounds, only to have the very next paragraph make that suspicion itself the object of its subtly poised irony. There is no dialectic in the dizzying back-and-forth of Walser's texts, no resolution of the inner contradictions. On the contrary, the tonal unresolvability of his writing only increased throughout his career. In his refusal to provide either syntheses or guidelines, and in the sheer, perverse pleasure in the uncertainty that he has sown, Walser succeeded in pushing the whole idea of a writerly text into a radically new direction.

"Can one call this literary writing?" he asked in "Under a Lime-Tree." Not always. But that is precisely one of the strengths of his prose. In the end, Walser's indifference to the literary assumptions and strategies that even the most experimental of his great contemporaries accepted helped him to attain something just as elusive and difficult as their modernist masterpieces: a body of work whose utter strangeness and originality, of purpose and of design, sounds like no one but him. A single page of Walser, taken from anywhere in his work, is instantly recognizable as his. And that, surely, is the one reliable sign of a writer who continues to matter. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Emptiness

I'm empty. No, not *really* empty; I was trained not to be that. The battle of ideas is never over, is it? The responsible citizen, the responsible critic: they are sleepless creatures. Last week I was in Jerusalem for a few days, and I am brimming with impressions and ideas. Obama and Clinton and McCain continue to inspire thoughts, and of course witticisms. A few days ago a friend of mine published a miserable piece on a matter about which I care deeply, and I am of a mind to be withering about it. The decline of *The New York Times* remains worthy of comment, as does the poverty of imagination in American theater and film. But for now I am refusing to play. I am in the mood not to be smart. The gladiatorial combat of opinion, of transient things importantly stated, leaves me cold. It is not transience at its best. Recent joys and sorrows have shaken me loose, temporarily, from the frenzy of applied intelligence, from the bait of the hum and the buzz. Nothing is more enlivening than private experience, not even a primary in a major state. So I prefer, as Barthes once said in a lecture, to entrust myself to the banality within me, and thereby be restored to the sort of reflection that does not await the evening news to find its subject. Compared to the mad rush of fine minds to satisfy the appetites of the world, to rise in the world by interpreting it, there is nothing at all parochial about the confinements of interiority; turning away from what passes for history, turning inward, hitting the "off" switches, is a kind of reverse cosmopolitanism. And mawkishly I must admit also that the catastrophes in Burma and China have had the distant consequence of shutting me up: I cannot quite work myself into a consideration of those children from a policy standpoint, though I am grateful that others will do so, and punditry is no place for the agonies of philosophy. (That is a minority opinion, of course. It is remarkable how many of the ultimate questions can now be answered in 750 words.) So my problem is that I am not empty enough. The habit of discourse is hard to break. One way to elide reality is to keep talking about it.

A decade ago I used to worry that the new technologies of communication would irreparably damage writing, and therefore reading, and therefore the life of language. Email is more than typing but less than writing, and the brevity that is decreed by its speed has produced all sorts of degradations of informality and inarticulateness. That, as I say, was a decade ago. But now there is nothing more dazzling on the web, and hence in the galaxy, than video, and every newspaper, every magazine, every bedroom, is a television studio, and so it is the end of significant speech that I anxiously envision. It is being usurped by talkativeness. All those prattling heads—how can people spend so much time watching other people speak? Is conversation a sport? Is all this chin music really conversation? Are we witnessing the process of opinion-formation in a wired democracy, or is this just the voyeurism of the educated, a kind of high-end eavesdropping—a silly fantasy of PartisanReview.com? Whatever it is, the American fear of silence may finally be retired, because silence, like oblivion, is no more. Everybody will now be heard from, even if it will be hard to hear anybody. As for the jabberers themselves: they do not look their best, and often they demonstrate that there are few activities less effortful than speech. The more substantial the theme, the more ludicrous is its dispatch in a few minutes of earnest chatter. Go to a dreary website called Bigthink.com and "browse big ideas"—"identity," "life and death," "truth and justice"—and you will see what I mean. Here is the false promise of the end of obscurity; profundity for busy people, delivered by people with time on their hands; an electronic gospel of relaxation; a slick hoax upon real thinking. And back in the material world, there are journals that sometimes look like the print-versions of their loquacious festivals and conferences. The rabbis in antiquity—B.C., or before connectedness—created a voluntary institution of personal mortification called a "speech fast," in which an individual would refrain from talking for a day so as to recover his moral and mental bearings. Life was never as overwhelming as it is now, but it was always overwhelming; and verbal abstention was regarded as a reliable instrument for stopping the madness. But in a logorrheic society, in which obtrusiveness confers ontology and you are what you say, such an act of inner renovation, such a spiritual exercise, is almost unimaginable. If you are what you say, you are nothing when you say nothing.

The road from Farragut Square to Dupont Circle was once a grand and lovely boulevard. Where arid office buildings now stand noble dwellings once stood. A photograph from 1890 shows the elegant mansions of Shepherd's Row on the northeast corner of Connecticut Avenue and K Street, in one of whose ballrooms a party once concluded with the release of thousands of butterflies, and across the street a quiet grove of trees. For the past few weeks a wrecking ball has been destroying a severe Alphaville-like structure on that same corner. Every day the violence brought more of the building down, exposing more of its steel and cement entrails. It was a splendid emblem of the lucky freakishness of this country: the ruins so familiar from photographs of terrorism here signify (but alas, no longer always) prosperity. Finally there stood only a twisting nine-story gyre of scheduled devastation, with dirtied white doors opening into nothingness, and in the middle of a moonless night it, too, was crushed. The spectacle of this wound in the city was irresistible, and not only for the historical irony that it suggested. It was a gash in the local order, a glimpse of the desolation that lives beneath the noisy organizations of existence, and therefore it pleased me: it confirmed my impatience with the patina, and ratified the collapse of my pride in my own sophistication. The eruption of chaos in the heart of one of the world capitals of instrumental rationality made me glad. Even here some darkness may be detected. The tranquility of the rubble held me. This time the call of brilliant argument would have to wait, and yield to more fundamental reveries in which brilliance has no place. And so my confused friend, the one who perpetrated that op-ed piece, got away. He knows who he is.

Leon Wieseltier

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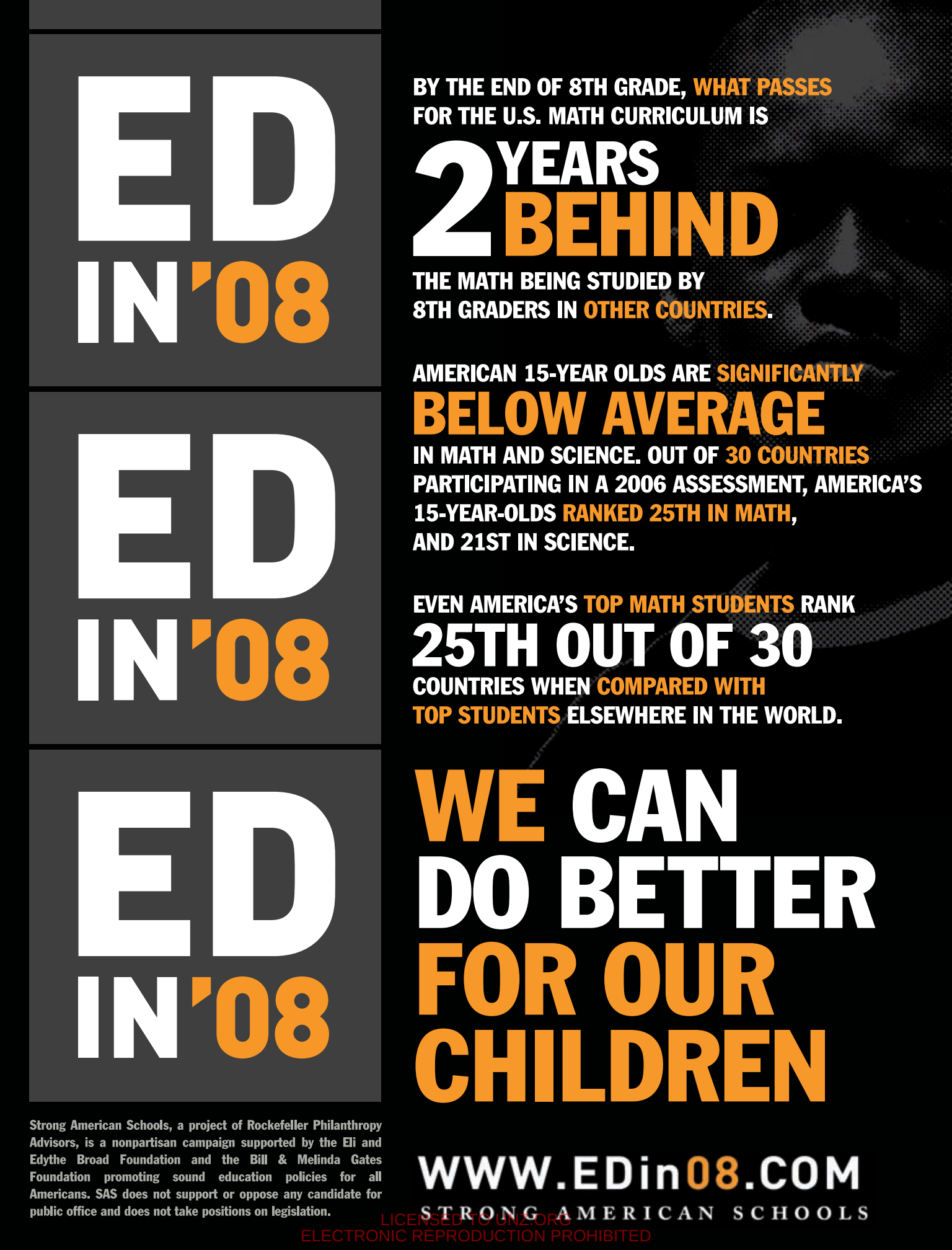
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